

FREED SLAVES AND ROMAN IMPERIAL CULTURE

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND THE
TRANSFORMATION OF VALUES

ROSE MACLEAN



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During the transition from republic to empire, the Roman aristocracy adapted traditional values to accommodate the advent of monarchy. *Freed Slaves and Roman Imperial Culture* examines the ways in which members of the elite appropriated strategies from freed slaves to negotiate their relationship to the *princeps* and to redefine measures of individual progress. Primarily through the medium of inscribed burial monuments, Roman freedmen entered a broader conversation about power, honor, virtue, memory, and the nature of the human life course. Through this process, former slaves exerted a profound influence on the transformation of aristocratic values at a critical moment in Roman history.

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Social Integration and the Transformation of Values

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For Marnie and Don

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	page viii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xi
1 Freed Slaves and the Roman Elite	i
2 Achieving Immortality under the Principate	35
3 Cultural Exchange in Roman Society	73
4 Imperial Freedmen and Imperial Power	104
5 Telling Life Stories	131
Conclusion	170
<i>Bibliography</i>	175
<i>Index</i>	205

Figures

1	Tomb of Eurysaces. Photo: author	<i>page</i> 6
2	Tomb of Eurysaces, South Frieze. Photo: author	7
3	Tomb of Eurysaces, North Frieze. Photo: author	8
4	Tomb of Eurysaces, West Frieze. Photo: author	9
5	Epitaph of Atistia. Photo: author, su concessione del Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo – Soprintendenza Speciale per il Colosseo, il Museo Nazionale Romano e l'Area archeologica di Roma	10
6	Tomb marker of P. Pontius Iucundus et al. Photo: Museo Lapidario Maffeiano	23
7	Tomb marker of Laeonas. Photo: author	127
8	Illustration of excavations on the Via Appia, showing the epitaph of A. Memmius Clarus. Photo: Archive of the British School at Rome	139
9	Cinerary urn of Egrilia Felicitas. Photo: Museo Nazionale Romano alle Terme di Diocleziano, su concessione del Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo – Soprintendenza Speciale per il Colosseo, il Museo Nazionale Romano e l'Area archeologica di Roma	141
10	Dedication to Lake Benacus by Q. Samicius Successus. Photo: Museo Lapidario Maffeiano	149

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Abbreviations

<i>AE</i>	<i>L'Année épigraphique</i>
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
<i>CLE</i>	F. Bücheler and E. Lommatzsch, <i>Carmina Latina Epigraphica</i>
<i>FRB</i>	A. R. Birley, <i>The Fasti of Roman Britain</i>
<i>ILLRP</i>	A. Degrassi, <i>Inscriptiones Latinae Liberae Rei Publicae</i>
<i>ILS</i>	H. Dessau, <i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i>
<i>MANN</i>	Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli
<i>MLM</i>	Museo Lapidario Maffeiano
<i>MNR</i>	Museo Nazionale Romano
<i>Mus. Vat.</i>	Musei Vaticani
<i>NSc</i>	<i>Notizie degli scavi</i>
<i>PIR</i>	E. Klebs et al., <i>Prosopographia Imperii Romani saec. I. II. III</i>
<i>SIG³</i>	W. Dittenberger, <i>Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum</i> , 3rd ed.

Freed Slaves and the Roman Elite

Freed slaves in the Roman world commanded a remarkable amount of wealth and influence, despite the restrictions placed on their freedom. Artisans and shopkeepers whose working lives began in captivity were able to amass substantial assets after manumission. High-ranking freedmen (*liberti*) from aristocratic households, including that of the emperor, enjoyed even greater opportunities for advancement. Select freedmen gained access to the inner sanctums of political authority, for instance by serving as support staff for elite patrons, by association with the reigning *princeps*, or by promoting the careers of their freeborn sons in local politics. This upwardly mobile subset of former slaves constituted a “freed elite” – a stigmatized, but highly integrated, population that contributed in myriad ways to the economy, politics, society, and culture of the Roman empire, particularly in urban centers.¹

Interaction among slaves, freedmen, and freeborn individuals (*ingenui*) of various ranks was a pervasive feature of Roman society. Despite occupying a subordinate status, slaves lived and worked closely among the free.² According to Tacitus, when the murder of Pedanius Secundus

¹ Bell and Ramsby (2012: 4). Mouritsen (2011a) is the most comprehensive and up-to-date study of Roman freedmen currently available; despite differences in focus, my debt to this work will be apparent from the frequency with which it is cited on a range of key issues. Treggiari (1969) also remains fundamental, as does Fabre (1981). On specific questions related to Roman manumission and the status and cultural practices of ex-slaves, see especially Perry (2014); Borbonus (2014); Bell and Ramsby (2012); D’Ambra and Métraux (2006); George (2005, 2006); Joshel (1992); Kleijwegt (2001, 2006); Petersen (2006); Mouritsen (2004, 2005); Gardner (1993: 7–51); Bradley (1984: 81–112; 1994: 154–165); Waldstein (1986); Kampen (1981); Kleiner (1977); Zanker (1975); Weaver (1972); Boulvert (1970); Chantraine (1967); Lambert (1934). The frequency of manumission at Rome and size of the freed population are extremely difficult to quantify; for recent approaches to this problem, see Scheidel (2005); De Ligt and Garnsey (2012).

² Roman ideology defined slaves as “outsiders within,” as noted by Finley (1998: 299–300); Parker (1998: 254); see also Patterson (1982: 39–40). On slaves in the Roman house, see Joshel and Petersen (2014: 24–86); Joshel (2013: 109–120); George (1997; 2011: 388–390); Wallace-Hadrill (1988: 77–81; 1994: 38–64); Webster (2005).

prompted the execution of that man's entire slave household, the *plebs* came to the defense of the innocent.³ Condemning 400 slaves to death would not have incited a public outcry without the existence of significant ties between these men and women and the wider community.⁴ Such ties could have formed through kinship, economic activity, neighborhoods, and guilds, to name a few probable contexts.⁵ At the same time, slaves of Roman aristocrats circulated at the highest echelons of society and, in part because of their ubiquitous presence, were essential to elite self-definition.⁶

Upon manumission, ex-slaves joined the free community but continued to bear the stigma of their prior condition.⁷ In the Roman system, those who had been liberated through formal channels became citizens (*cives*). Although barred from holding magistracies and serving in the regular army, these *liberti* were able to vote, form legal marriages, own and transmit property, and produce legitimate children.⁸ The Romans' practice of enfranchising freedmen was unique in the ancient Mediterranean, and contemporary observers praised its capacity to increase the size of the citizenry.⁹ However, the enrollment of former slaves in the *civitas* also raised anxiety among the Greco-Roman elite about the integrity of Rome's civic body.¹⁰ Even if they agreed that the custom's foundations were sound in principle, aristocrats worried about the perceived quality of the freedmen

³ Tac. *Ann.* 14.42.2: "However that may be, when according to ancient custom (*vetere ex more*) it was proper that the entire slave household which had dwelled under the same roof be led off to execution, in the throng of plebeians, who were protecting the innocent, things reached a point of insurrection and the senate [was besieged]; even in that body there was a group who opposed excessive severity, while most were of the opinion that nothing should be changed." For the practice of executing slaves whose master has been murdered, see Cic. *Fam.* 4.12; on the *SC Silanianum* (10 CE) and later decisions that reinforced this rule, see now Harries (2013).

⁴ Finley (1998: 171): "The plebeian riots were aimed not at slavery as an institution, but at saving the lives of individuals with whom the *plebs* (many of them freedmen or descendants of freedmen, some of them presumably slaves themselves) associated with daily in their work and their social life."

⁵ On the social composition of Rome's neighborhoods, see Lott (2004: 4); for guilds, Tran (2006b: esp. 49–88); for mixed-status families, see Rawson (1966); Weaver (1986).

⁶ Fitzgerald (2000: 5); Edmondson (2011: 346).

⁷ Mouritsen (2011a: 12); *contra* Vermote (2016).

⁸ On specific limits faced by ex-slaves in civil law, including with respect to patrons' rights of testation, see Gardner (1993: 20–32). Exceptions to the general rule against freed magistrates are analyzed by Coles (2017).

⁹ The earliest reliable evidence for this practice is *XII Tabulae* (Warmington) 5.8; cf. Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 4.22.3–4 (where the custom is attributed to Servius Tullius) and Livy 2.5.9–10 (where it is dated to 509 BCE); Mouritsen (2011a: 68). For a positive evaluation of the Romans' enfranchisement of freedmen, see above all the famous letter to the Greek city of Larisa by Philip V of Macedon (*SIG* 543).

¹⁰ Livy's account of Romulus' Asylum characterizes the newcomers as a mob "without distinction between slave or free" (1.8.6); see Dench (2005: 11–20) on this myth. Cf. Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 4.24 for a Greek author's criticism of the practice of manumission by Romans in later periods.

who became eligible for the privilege. Augustus' manumission laws, for example, were likely designed to restore a sense of order by establishing controls over the freeing of slaves.¹¹

The institution of patronage facilitated the integration of *liberti* into free society.¹² In theory, if not always in practice, Roman freedmen's quasi-familial bond with their patrons ensured that they would have proper guidance. Manumitted slaves regularly assumed the *praenomen* and *nomen* of their owner, with *libertus* appearing where *filius* did in the nomenclature of freeborn citizens.¹³ The paternalism apparent in this onomastic convention distinguished *liberti* from freeborn clients, whose connection to patrons was framed more in terms of friendship than of kinship, despite the relevance of these forms of dependency to each other.¹⁴ Patronage sustained masters' authority after manumission, in addition to supporting freedmen's careers. Many ex-slaves worked for their patron directly or received financial support for their own business ventures.¹⁵ Having an elite patron could enhance a freedman's social standing and benefit his freeborn offspring.

Even as *liberti* interacted closely with other groups, they shared with each other the basic experiences of enslavement and manumission.¹⁶ These experiences in turn shaped their engagement of Roman culture in ways that produced a discernible subculture, albeit one with changeable boundaries. For the principate, that subculture is visible to modern historians largely through epigraphic and archaeological evidence, especially (but not exclusively) in the area of funerary commemoration. Most strikingly, freedmen in imperial Rome and Italy commissioned funerary inscriptions in significantly higher proportions than did *ingenui* of any rank.¹⁷ Like all commemorators, these freedmen worked within established parameters to represent themselves, their kin, and their close associates, for example by attesting the stability of families after manumission or by citing vocational

¹¹ Mouritsen (2011a: 91–92); Bradley (1994: 157).

¹² This issue is covered in depth by Mouritsen (2011a: 36–51).

¹³ Fabre (1981: 93–127).

¹⁴ On the application of *amicitia* to the client–patron relationship, see Saller (1982: 11–15); see below, pp. 79–80.

¹⁵ Mouritsen (2011a: 206–247) emphasizes the importance of patronage to freed slaves' success in the Roman economy; cf. the concept of the “independent freedman” proffered by Veyne (1961), Garnsey (1981); reassessed by Verboven (2012: 95–98).

¹⁶ Mouritsen (2011a: 284).

¹⁷ Mouritsen (2004; 2005: 38; 2011a: 127–128); Taylor (1961); D'Arms (1974: 112); Sigismund Nielsen (1997: 203); King (2000: 121–122); Heinzelmann (2000), cf. Mouritsen (2004); Beltrán Lloris (2004) for Roman Spain; Carroll (2006: 247–250); Cooley (2012: 53–54). It should be noted that soldiers also developed an epigraphic subculture, but with its own character and motivations; see Hope (1997, 2001, 2003a, 2003b).

titles.¹⁸ The strategies that ex-slaves used in commemorative settings furnish valuable evidence for how they negotiated their place in society.¹⁹

At the same time, the subculture in which *liberti* participated interacted with others, including that of the freeborn elite. Although literary texts and inscribed monuments require different kinds of analysis, evaluating these sources against one another has the potential to illuminate an exchange of cultural forms between aristocrats and former slaves. To be certain, the freedmen who appear in Roman literature tend to embody aristocratic assumptions and stereotypes, although there are important exceptions to this commonly cited rule.²⁰ Yet even the most prejudiced authors – men like Petronius and the younger Pliny – demonstrate relatively detailed knowledge of freedmen’s commemorative practices. They appropriate, selectively and for their own rhetorical purposes, strategies that *liberti* developed in response to their distinctive condition.

This appropriation came in many guises, from parody to encomia for members of the imperial household in works like Seneca’s *Ad Polybium* and Statius’ *Silvae*. It was not always made explicit, nor was it necessarily less exploitative than the literary representation of slaves. Yet under the principate, I will argue, models borrowed from freedmen provided one mechanism for the transformation of elite culture. When the rise of monarchy altered the traditional paths through which most aristocrats pursued lasting glory, members of the elite turned to commemorative strategies that were adapted in part from ex-slaves. These strategies include the derivation of honor from hard work and loyal service (Chapters 2–4), but also the reliance on frameworks other than those prescribed by the dominant ideology to measure personal progress (Chapter 5). Among the network of subcultures that made up Roman culture, that of *liberti* interacted productively with that of the elite to catalyze historical change.²¹

¹⁸ Family: Mouritsen (2005; 2011a: 285–289). Community: Borbonus (2014). Work: Joshel (1992); George (2006). See also Petersen (2006: 84–120, 184–226); Leach (2006).

¹⁹ Petersen and Joshel (2014) have fruitfully applied Certeau’s distinction between “strategy” and “tactic” to masters and slaves in the Roman world. By contrast, where the burial culture of *liberti* is concerned, I would argue that ex-slaves’ forays into “enemy territory” established command over space and memory in a way that Certeau’s “tactics” do not (Certeau 1984: 36–39). Freedmen’s monuments sought to establish a lasting record, even if commemorators’ use of language and iconography may be described as opportunistic. On these grounds, I have opted not to distinguish between “strategy” and “tactic” in the technical sense for the purposes of this study.

²⁰ See below, pp. 73–103.

²¹ Wallace-Hadrill (2008a: 3–37); Bell and Ramsby (2012); and, from a different perspective, Patterson (1991: 227–257).

Revisiting the Tomb of the Baker

Although its status as a representative of freed culture has been called into question, the Tomb of the Baker nevertheless provides a useful point of departure. Standing today outside the Porta Maggiore in Rome, the monument was built from travertine blocks in the second half of the first century BCE and originally rose more than 30 feet above street level (fig. 1).²² Its three extant sides are punctuated by cylindrical openings that have been persuasively identified as kneading machines, as well as by inscriptions that commemorate the deceased, Eurysaces.²³ The longest and most complete version of this text is located on the western face:²⁴

Est hoc monimentum Margei Vergilei Eurysacis | pistoris redemptoris
apparet(oris).

This is the tomb of Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces, baker, contractor, public servant.

Peering toward the roof of this peculiar tomb, viewers encounter a frieze that depicts scenes from a commercial bakery, presumably meant to evoke the establishment in which Eurysaces acquired his fortune (figs. 2–4).

All three panels of the frieze display equipment used in the mass production of bread.²⁵ On the south face, donkeys power two grinders at the center of the frame while state officials record the receipt of grain. Enslaved workers in tunics operate the mills and sift flour, and a togate manager oversees quality control.²⁶ On the north face, the processes of kneading and shaping the dough lead to the image of a large oven, into which a slave inserts loaves to be cooked; at this point, the panel breaks off. The western face shows the finished product being carried in baskets, weighed on a tall set of scales, and registered by state officials. Taken together, the panels construct a progressive narrative about the phases of

²² Ciancio Rossetto (1973); Brandt (1993); Petersen (2003; 2006: 84–120). For a review of the debate about dating Eurysaces' monument, see Brandt (1993: 13); Petersen (2006: 99, n. 44).

²³ Kneading machines: Ciancio Rossetto (1973: 34); Petersen (2006: 110–114). Inscriptions: *CIL* I².1203–1205 = *ILS* 7460a–c = *ILLRP* 850.

²⁴ *CIL* I².1204. On another reading, the text might be translated: “This is the monument of Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces, baker and contractor – it is obvious!” See Petersen (2003: 249; 2006: 87, n. 13); Ciancio Rossetto (1973: 35–36); Treggiari (1969: 96, n. 6).

²⁵ Petersen (2006: 108). Grinders and donkeys, as well as other tools of the trade, became common symbols of baking, even without the inclusion of *pistor*; see, for example, the sarcophagus of P. Nonius Zethus, *CIL* 14.393 = Mus. Vat. (Mus. Chiaramonti) Inv. 1343 = Zimmer 25 (Ostia, first century CE).

²⁶ Curtis (2001: 358–367).



Figure 1 Tomb of Eurysaces; Rome, first century BCE.
Photo: author.



Figure 2 Tomb of Eurysaces, South Frieze, with scenes depicting processing of grain; Rome, first century BCE.
Photo: author.



Figure 3 Tomb of Eurysaces, North Frieze, with scenes depicting kneading and baking; Rome, first century BCE.
Photo: author.



Figure 4 Tomb of Eurysaces, West Frieze, with scenes depicting transport and weighing; Rome, first century BCE.
Photo: author.

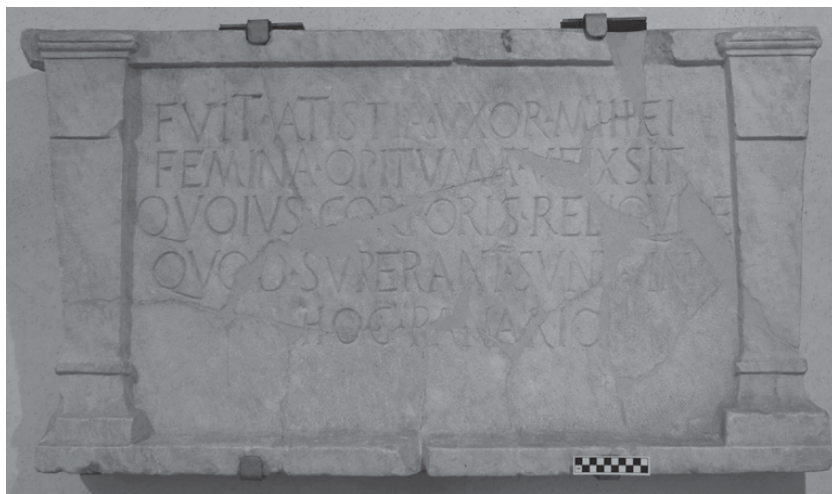


Figure 5 Epitaph of Atistia, possible wife of Eurysaces; Rome, first century BCE.
Photo: author, su concessione del Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali
e del turismo – Soprintendenza Speciale per il Colosseo, il Museo Nazionale
Romano e l'Area archeologica di Roma.

bread-baking and, at the same time, create a snapshot of an organized bakery at the height of its operations.²⁷

The surviving elements of Eurysaces' tomb may have been augmented by a full-length portrait and an additional inscription, both of which were discovered near the site and have been attributed to its damaged eastern face.²⁸ The portrait represents a togate man and palliate woman standing next to each other, their heads turned inward to show that they are husband and wife.²⁹ The inscription celebrates a marital bond (fig. 5):³⁰

Fuit Atistia uxor mihei | femina opituma veixsit | quoius corporis reliquiae |
quod superant sunt in | hoc panario.

Atistia was my wife, an excellent woman during her lifetime; what remains
of her body is in this breadbasket.

Because Atistia's epitaph contains archaisms and a punning reference to a breadbasket, she is often identified as Eurysaces' spouse. However, the

²⁷ The narrative is interrupted somewhat by the organization of the panels; see Ciancio Rossetto (1973: 41).

²⁸ Petersen (2006: 92–95) reviews Canina's influential nineteenth-century reconstruction.

²⁹ Kleiner (1977: 22–25); Petersen (2006: 93).

³⁰ *CIL* 1².1206 = MNR (Terme di Diocleziano) Inv. 72876; Friggeri (2001: 63); De Rosalia (1972: 60).

circumstances of the find and the presence of another baker's tomb in the area make it impossible to verify this attribution.³¹

Eurysaces' nomenclature, as presented in the inscriptions, lacks the indicator of status that normally appeared in *tria nomina* of ex-slaves at this time, but his Greek *cognomen* suggests a servile background.³² Buoyed by wealth and personal connections, Eurysaces could have joined the ranks of the *apparitores*, for example as a *lictor*, *viator*, *praeco*, or *accensus*, all of which positions were open to freedmen.³³ While formal elements leave his status implicit, these details would have prompted most ancient viewers to assume that the deceased was a former slave.³⁴ By the same token, modern interpreters of the tomb must account for the probability that Eurysaces began his career in captivity, although it is equally important to avoid construing his burial according to assumptions about the *nouveau riche* freedman.³⁵ In what follows, I take Eurysaces to have been a *libertus* but seek to emphasize issues other than the conspicuous display of wealth to illustrate commemorative strategies examined in the rest of this study.

On the one hand, the sculptural program allows viewers to link the deceased's achievements in freedom with his servile past, a connection which undermines the idea that captivity was a separate and shameful chapter of the freedman's life course. At the same time, this baker's persona embodies qualities that Roman slaves and *liberti* were required to cultivate if they wished to remain in good standing. Obedience, industry, and honesty all contribute to the presentation of Eurysaces, even if frugality and restraint of ambition are absent. By reshaping such virtues as marks of honor, rather than as marks of servility, the monument appropriates the expectations of slave-owners to secure a place for the deceased in the common memory.³⁶

Relating Eurysaces' freedom and wealth to his servile background requires interpreting the tomb's iconography from a variety of perspectives.³⁷ Several elements of the frieze emphasize the symbolic

³¹ Petersen (2006: 96–97); Ciancio Rossetto (1973: 71–73).

³² On the Greek *cognomen* as a sign of servility, see the extensive analysis of Solin (1971). Although the use of this marker is debated, I follow Mouritsen (2011a: 124–127) in taking Greek *cognomina* as rough indicators of servile background; but cf. Weaver (1991: 173–174); Bruun (2013). I use the word “servile” to describe legal status, but also refer to the term's pejorative meaning when discussing elite perceptions of slaves and *liberti*.

³³ Treggiari (1969: 153–159).

³⁴ Roman literary texts that associate Greek names with slave or freed status support this idea; Mouritsen (2011a: 124) lists examples.

³⁵ Petersen (2003; 2006: 6–10, 98–99) eloquently warns of the dangers. The use of Petronius as a historical source for freed culture is discussed in more detail below, in Chapter 3, but I preview my approach here.

³⁶ Joshel (1992) and George (2006) are important precedents for interpreting freed slaves' monuments and inscriptions as sites for the redefinition of ideals and conditions imposed by masters and patrons.

³⁷ Cf. Petersen (2006: 106, 116–117).

value of the figures over the apparent realism of the scenes. In contrast to Roman biographical art that distinguishes the commemorative from other characters, this frieze leaves open to question which (if any) of the men in the bakery ought to be identified as the deceased. Although the panels clearly separate slave from free on the basis of dress, no single character embodies Eurysaces.³⁸ Recent studies of the tomb have shown how this ambiguity encourages viewers to appreciate the broader symbolism of the *togati*, whose presence advertises freedom and citizenship, as well as the fulfillment of public contracts.³⁹

If the togate figures evoke Eurysaces' achievements after manumission, it is reasonable to posit that the slaves signify another stage of his career. From a conventional standpoint, the slaves enhance this freed baker's prestige by showing that he counted human chattels among the vast resources at his disposal. That *liberti* exercised over others the same authority to which they had been subjected as slaves conveys how efficiently the institution of slavery reproduced itself in Roman society. Vignettes in which artisans are attended by one or more slaves appear on tombstones and sarcophagi commissioned for freedmen, ostensibly to elevate the standing of the deceased to that of a propertied master.⁴⁰ Eurysaces' frieze supports a similar interpretation by drawing an unmistakable boundary between enslaved personnel and their superiors, who wear togas.

A more controversial but (to my mind) entirely plausible reading would have the slave laborers echo the circumstances in which Eurysaces began his ascent to success. A comparable approach has been taken to the mosaic of the grain-measurers (*mensores*) at Ostia, where a depiction of the *collegium's* members in action simultaneously illustrates the rungs of its hierarchy.⁴¹ The workers' jobs extend from a boy who keeps count of inventory to a well-dressed *mentor* who holds a small shovel above his head, perhaps to mark him as the guild's leader.⁴² Ancient viewers may have interpreted this occupational scene through the lens of personal experience, for example by tracking their own careers against the ranks depicted in the mosaic.

³⁸ Ciancio Rossetto (1973: 53) acknowledges this difficulty, despite efforts to overcome it.

³⁹ Brandt (1993); Petersen (2003: 245; 2006: 109).

⁴⁰ For examples, see Zimmer (1982: 69–70).

⁴¹ Clarke (2003: 127–129). The mosaic was commissioned near the middle of the third century CE for a hall originally built in 112. My intention is not to draw a connection with Eurysaces *per se*, but rather to adopt aspects of Clarke's methodology, namely the acknowledgment of compatibility between sequential and synchronic readings of a "workshop" scene.

⁴² Clarke (2003: 128); Beccati (1961: 34).

Accomplished *mensores* might recall the past, whereas for slaves “the image showed the way up to freedom.”⁴³

Along similar lines, the slaves on Eurysaces’ monument help to define a vocational *cursus* that the commemorand traversed in his lifetime. By far the most animated characters in each panel, they attract immediate attention as they lean into their tasks. Their physical involvement in the production process contrasts strongly with the static postures and administrative roles of the *togati*, who represent a subsequent phase of the baker’s career. Seen from this point of view, the slaves embody their status in the same way as the togate figures exemplify citizenship. Like the mosaic of the Ostian *mensores*, this scene of differentiated labor illustrates several rungs of a professional ladder at the same time as it captures in a single frame the activities of a workshop or field.⁴⁴

The inscriptions on the tomb’s north and west faces support a sequential reading of the frieze by plotting Eurysaces’ evolution from baker, to contractor, to (perhaps) public servant.⁴⁵ The word *pistor*, which refers to the act of baking, as well as to the trade as a whole, illuminates the images of slave personnel by establishing a baseline for Eurysaces’ career.⁴⁶ Slaves who performed these duties in large households or commercial bakeries were as worthy of the title as were freed businessmen like the deceased.⁴⁷ Yet the next term, *redemptor*, shifts the focus away from work toward managerial skill and involvement with the state.⁴⁸ *Apparitor* (if that is the correct reading) would continue this movement toward the civic sphere by naming an office that highlights not only citizenship but also political participation.

The frieze depicts slave and free characters in a way that signifies personal virtues. By casting interactions between enslaved personnel and togate managers as harmonious and productive, it suggests that Eurysaces cultivated *industria* and *obsequium* in his chattels. This would have molded the baker’s image into that of a “good” Roman master, whose restraint in the

⁴³ Clarke (2003: 129).

⁴⁴ Cf. Joshel and Petersen (2014: 125–128) on the extent to which the frieze simplifies the actual activities of a typical Roman bakery.

⁴⁵ For a sequential reading of the inscription, see Petersen (2003: 230, 249).

⁴⁶ On occupational titles as reflections of the servile past, see Joshel (1992: 59–60, 133) and further discussion below, in Chapter 5.

⁴⁷ Slave *pistores*: *CIL* 6.6337 = MNR (Terme di Diocleziano) Inv. 33265, *CIL* 6.4356 = Mus. Vat. Inv. 8996, *CIL* 6.37723, *AE* 1914, 143. *Liberti*: *CIL* 1².3034, 10.5934, *AE* 1923, 76. Also see Joshel (1992: 15, 80–81).

⁴⁸ On the probable nature and significance of the contracts, see Petersen (2003: 244, 249, n. 112).

treatment of his subordinates reflected well on his character.⁴⁹ However, as icons of Eurysaces' past, the disciplined and industrious slaves convey the benefits of acting according to masters' expectations, whatever the costs may have been. As a correlate to that idea, the presence of state officials in the bakery, the large balance on the western façade, and (if Atistia was buried in the tomb) the image of a stable union all portray the deceased as a morally upright ex-slave whose business practices were transparent.⁵⁰

According to this interpretation, the slaves laboring in the bakery both accentuate Eurysaces' identity as a master and initiate the range of statuses through which he had passed over time.⁵¹ Not every ancient viewer would have associated the slaves with Eurysaces' lowly beginnings, but those who did would have enriched their understanding of the monument by locating this baker's accomplishments within the broader scope of his life. Moreover, the same images associate traditionally servile virtues with Eurysaces' journey from slave to successful *libertus*. Despite its opulence, which undoubtedly attracted attention, the Tomb of the Baker reconfigures qualities like hard work and honesty to enhance the commemorand's standing in death.

Two passages in Petronius' *Satyrical* suggest that aristocrats who encountered the tomb may have been open to such a reading. When Encolpius first arrives at Trimalchio's house, he peruses a biographical mural that progresses from the slave market to the acquisition of freedom.⁵²

Erat autem venaliciū <cum> titulis pictum, et ipse Trimalchio capillatus caduceum tenebat Minervaque ducente Romam intrabat. Hinc quemadmodum ratiocinari didicisset, denique dispensator factus esset, omnia diligenter curiosus pictor cum inscriptione reddiderat. In deficiente vero iam porticu levatum mento in tribunal excelsum Mercurius rapiebat. Praesto erat Fortuna <cum> cornu abundanti [copiosa] et tres Parcae aurea pensa torquentes.

There was the slave market, painted complete with placards; and Trimalchio himself, sporting long hair, was holding Mercury's staff and was entering

⁴⁹ For this conceit, see Cic. *Q. Fr.* 1.1.18-19; cf. Plaut. *Pseud.* 133-228 and Dio Cass. 54.23.1-6 for vivid examples of the paradigmatic "bad" master.

⁵⁰ On the positive connotations of state supervision, cf. *CIL* 1.698 = *ILS* 5317 (Puteoli, 105 BCE), which contains the stipulation that the decurions approve a completed contract for the construction of a wall; see Du Plessis (2004: 291-295). It is unlikely that Eurysaces' tomb would depict an image of official oversight that obviously suggested punitive measures or would arouse the suspicion of dishonesty in ancient viewers. But cf. Morgan (2015: 104-106) for the Roman idea that such oversight should be unnecessary in a world where people respect the rules of *fides*. For an interpretation of the balance scene as a symbol of honesty in business, see Petersen (2006: 107); Kleiner (1992: 109).

⁵¹ On the ambiguity of transitional scenes in freedmen's funerary monuments, see also Bodel's comments on depictions of the slave market (1994: 244-245).

⁵² Petron. *Sat.* 29.3-6.

Rome, led by Minerva. Then, how he had learned to keep accounts and had been made *dispensator*, all of this the painstaking artist had recounted along with an explanatory caption. At the place where the porch wall ended, Mercury was whisking him up by the chin to a lofty tribunal. Fortuna stood by with her horn of plenty and the three Fates, spinning their golden threads.

It has been observed that this mural echoes funerary customs to portray Trimalchio's house as a mausoleum and the subsequent episode as a *katabasis*.⁵³ In this context, the tribunal scene casts manumission as an apotheosis, which marks the recipient's transition to a new state of being.⁵⁴ However, the narrative also suggests continuity between Trimalchio's servile past and free present by explaining to visitors the structure they are about to enter; the painting links Trimalchio's career and advancement out of captivity to his current wealth.⁵⁵

A related passage in which Trimalchio tells his life story draws on similar themes.⁵⁶ "My thriftiness (*frugalitas*) led me to this fortune," he claims, before describing his arrival from Asia and early years in captivity. Despite trying to hasten the onset of puberty by applying lamp oil to his lips, he served as his masters' *puer delicatus* until the age of 14.⁵⁷ Trimalchio fends off criticism by claiming that he became "lord of the house" and inherited a massive legacy. His story highlights how strategic deference led to his present standing, despite the loss of his initial investment in a shipwreck. This satirical account resonates with forms present in the Tomb of the Baker. Comparing the two artifacts does not necessitate viewing Eurysaces as a historical Trimalchio, or vice versa. Rather, it helps to illuminate what aspects of freed culture Petronius and his readers are likely to have noticed, if only to exploit for their own reasons.

Slave and Freed Culture

Eurysaces' tomb can be linked to a subculture generated by Roman freedmen on the basis of shared legal status. I use the term "freed culture" as shorthand for a collection of strategies through which ex-slaves negotiated

⁵³ Bodel (1994).

⁵⁴ Bodel (1994: 248; 2017: 96).

⁵⁵ As emphasized by Patterson (1991: 245).

⁵⁶ Petron. *Sat.* 75.8–77.7. On this passage's connection to the mural scene, as well as to the tale of Clesippus at Plin. *HN* 34.6.11–12, see Bodel (1989b).

⁵⁷ Bodel (1989a).

their place in society. I have limited my analysis of freedmen's inscribed monuments to the claims that commemorators made and the rhetorical strategies that they employed.⁵⁸ That is to say, for example, that an ex-slave who opts to highlight continuity between captivity and freedom in an epitaph commissioned for his own burial constructs a particular version of his life story. His choices reflect outward claims about which aspects of his biography were worthy of commemoration and in what format. How he felt about the past and what untold losses he had incurred along the way to freedom, as well as after manumission, remain invisible in most instances. Nevertheless, strategies of representation were powerful tools of survival, subversion, and cultural engagement, tools with which Roman freedmen could implement changes that had a reverberating historical impact.

Tombstones compose the most prolific and most direct source of evidence for "freed culture" under the empire, to such an extent that my use of the term requires further qualification. At a basic level, these monuments reflect decisions made by commemorators about how to present themselves, family members, friends, associates, patrons, and their own slaves and freedmen.⁵⁹ Some commemorative strategies likely mirrored approaches employed in everyday contexts, whether to manage the patron-freedman relationship or to navigate wider social networks. Yet burial monuments define a specific realm of activity, one in which freedmen participated in elevated proportions and which brought them into dialogue with the commemorative practices of the elite. In this sense, the epigraphic material represents both a source of insight into freed culture, broadly defined, and evidence for a subculture all its own.

While productive, isolating freedmen establishes analytical boundaries that were not always fixed on the ground. This is especially true of the difference between slaves and *liberti*. Epigraphic patterns among the enslaved differ from those among freedmen, in large part because freedom and (for some) citizenship raised a new set of questions.

⁵⁸ Laird's (2015: 23–24) approach to inscribed monuments is instructive; but cf. Stewart (2012: 11–12) for the argument that actions reflect values. Joshel (1992: 9–15) applies feminist methodologies to interpret occupational inscriptions from Rome in terms of individual and collective identities. Many valuable studies that address freed slaves' identities or mentalities from various angles could be cited, e.g. Zanker (1975); Kleiner (1977); Leppin (1996); Kleijwegt (2001, 2006); George (2005, 2006); Leach (2006); Borbonus (2014: esp. 135–142); see also the discussion by Mouritsen (2011a: 279–299). Although the present contribution began as an investigation of ex-slaves' identities in relation to those of the elite, I ultimately adopted a different approach. Analyzing the depiction of industry, deference, and other normative virtues by freedmen as commemorative strategies seemed (to me) preferable to reading identities into these representations, since commemorative monuments project a specific kind of persona.

⁵⁹ Shaw (1991: 67); Hope (2001: 24); Flower (2006: 1).

Patronage and the naming of freeborn children are two obvious examples of considerations that were specific to ex-slaves, whose choices in these areas reflect underlying decisions about how to approach freedom and its limits. Fundamental structures like the family also took on altered significance after one's release from slavery, as did the accumulation of wealth.⁶⁰ Still, basic inequalities and stigmas persisted from one status to another, and these forces prompted reactions from *liberti* that are in some respects comparable to those undertaken by slaves.⁶¹ When such connections are especially evident, I refer to "slave and freed" or "servile" culture not to confuse the issue unnecessarily but to acknowledge the contiguous nature of these populations.

The diversity of the so-called *ordo libertinus* poses additional problems. The principle that "all cultures are comprised of many disparate subgroups or subcultures, whose identity and existence are constantly shifting and realigning" pertains as much to each of those subcultures as to Roman culture at large.⁶² For example, enslaved agricultural workers required different approaches to authority than did personal attendants in elite urban households, even if certain tactics were effective in both settings.⁶³ Nor were all *liberti* created equal. The *lex Iunia* extended Latin rights to slaves manumitted informally and created mechanisms through which they might earn the franchise.⁶⁴ Even among freedmen who had become *cives*, factors like gender, wealth, vocation, patron's status, and levels of civic engagement determined an individual's standing in the community.

The epigraphic evidence represents only a limited subset of this heterogeneous population. Monuments presume at least a moderate level of wealth, as the minimum price of a simple gravestone in imperial Italy registered in the hundreds of sesterces.⁶⁵ While collective tombs and burial clubs defrayed these costs for some people, most of the empire's poorest inhabitants left no tangible memory of their existence. My analyses of ex-slaves' commemorative practices are therefore confined to men and women of sufficient means to have had their names inscribed on a monument. Urban businessmen, domestic staff in elite households, and members of the

⁶⁰ Mouritsen (2005: 60–62; 2011a: 285–289).

⁶¹ See below, p. 39.

⁶² Kurke (2011: 23).

⁶³ Bradley (2011: 379).

⁶⁴ On Junian Latinity, see Weaver (1990, 1997, 2001); López Barja de Quiroga (1998); Sirks (1981); Koops (2012, 2014).

⁶⁵ Carroll (2006: 77–78); Duncan-Jones (1974: 127–131).

familia Caesaris stand out as notable subgroups.⁶⁶ Overall, my conclusions apply to a narrow segment of freed culture, which must be assumed to have been more complex and varied than the inscriptional evidence can accurately portray. Nor have I accounted for the embeddedness of ex-slaves in the urban *plebs*, an important topic that nevertheless lies beyond the scope of this study.

The strongest ties of commonality among former slaves would have stemmed from the shared experiences of enslavement and manumission.⁶⁷ This brings my theoretical outlook into alignment with that of Mintz and Price in their classic essay on *The Birth of African-American Culture*. In their view, enslaved populations “were not *communities* of people at first, and they could only become communities by processes of culture change. What the slaves undeniably shared at the outset was their enslavement; all – or nearly all – else had to be *created by them*.”⁶⁸ Such an approach fits well with the parameters of the Roman slave system, where ethnic diversity prevailed, even after natural reproduction overtook warfare as the main source of new chattels.⁶⁹ This is not to suggest that ancient slaves and *liberti* constructed their communities exclusively on the basis of legal status. Rather, it is to posit that servile culture hinged on a common set of strategies through which slaves and *liberti* responded to the pressures they faced.

These negotiations formed one part of a dialogue between ex-slaves and the freeborn elite. According to a conventional “trickle-down” paradigm, Roman aristocrats passed their styles, tastes, behaviors, and social norms to those of inferior status. As a result, Trimalchio’s brand of unrefined imitation has been perceived as a dominant characteristic of freed culture. To cite one example of this type of thinking, “as small men aped the ways

⁶⁶ Winterling (1999: 115–116) questions the historical accuracy of this title, but I retain it here and throughout as a matter of convenience.

⁶⁷ Mouritsen (2011a: 284).

⁶⁸ Mintz and Price (1992: 18), with italics in the original. For the scholarly impact of Mintz and Price’s work, see Palmié (1992: xx); Brown (2008: 7). By contrast, historians who emphasize the West African heritage of cultural forms like the Ring Shout have followed Stuckey (2013); see also Stuckey (2006) and Ntloedibe (2006).

⁶⁹ On sources of slaves, and on the debate concerning this problem, see Scheidel (2011). In certain contexts, such as Sicily in the second century BCE, ethnicity could provide a point of solidarity for enslaved men and women; see Shaw (2001: 8–10). However, concentrating slaves of the same ethnic background in one *familia* was discouraged by Varro (*Rust.* 1.17.5); cf. Pl. *Leg.* 6.777b–c; Arist. *Pol.* 7.1330a25–28. Tacitus has C. Cassius claim that “we have nations in our households, with different customs, and foreign rites or none at all” (*Ann.* 14.44). Epigraphic evidence for ethnic diversity in slave households includes *CIL* 1².2965a, 6.9675.

of their betters, cultural influences flowed overwhelmingly downwards in Graeco-Roman society, rather than up.”⁷⁰ Freedmen undoubtedly engaged forms and practices handed down from above. However, as hierarchical versions of Roman cultural history are displaced by more fluid models, the consequences of ex-slaves’ exchange with aristocrats increasingly come into view.⁷¹

My approach to this phenomenon builds on theoretical frameworks often applied to the Roman slave system, in particular the distinction between public and hidden transcripts introduced by Scott. Responding to neo-Marxist paradigms in which subordinates internalize the ideology of their oppressors and become complicit in their own domination, Scott argued for the existence of multiple levels of discourse – a public transcript that follows normative standards and hidden transcripts that enable people to speak freely among their peers.⁷² Scott’s model has been deployed by students of ancient slavery to disparate ends. Some have used transcript theory to solidify the position that classical literature, written “by and for the elite,” addresses the concerns of masters but says little about those of slaves.⁷³ By contrast, Scott’s contention that hidden transcripts appear publicly in coded or sanitized versions – for instance, gossip, jokes, and animal fables – supports the analysis of certain bodies of evidence for traces of an alternative discourse.⁷⁴

This latter application is best suited to genres like Roman comedy and folktale, genres which encode potentially subversive content.⁷⁵ A similar case has been made for anonymous political graffiti.⁷⁶ However, ex-slaves’ commemorative monuments fit less easily into Scott’s frame. Their inscriptions are neither anonymous nor, in the majority of cases, designed specifically to obscure unauthorized messages. In the case of Eurysaces, to use a concrete example, one could conceivably argue that allusions to the servile past are ambiguous, perhaps even suppressed

⁷⁰ Lendon (1997: 100), discussing communities of honor in the Roman world; see also Veyne (1961: 245); cf. Borg (2012: 40).

⁷¹ Wallace-Hadrill (2008a: 28–37); Horsfall (2003: 65–66).

⁷² Scott (1990: 70–82, 90–96) describes how his views differ from Gramscian notions of cultural hegemony; the problem is cogently discussed in the context of ancient history by Morstein-Marx (2012: 192–196; 2013).

⁷³ McCarthy (2000: 17–18, 20–21); Joshel (2011: 215).

⁷⁴ Scott (1990: 19). For recent applications to the ancient world, see Kurke (2011: 11); Forsdyke (2012: 14–15); Richlin (2014). Richlin (2014: 177–178, n. 4, 179–180) offers an incisive critique of the use of Scott by McCarthy and others. See also the comments of Morstein-Marx (2012: 196).

⁷⁵ For an explicit reference to this capacity of fable in Roman antiquity, see Phaed. 3.*Prolog.* 33–37.

⁷⁶ Morstein-Marx (2012).

to deflect the criticism of more prejudiced viewers. However, the tomb's most disruptive message is also its most obvious one – namely, that Eurysaces' fortune justifies a lavish burial that will record his achievements. Thus, while Scott's work continues to be instructive, a more open model of communication between status groups better accommodates (to my mind) the nuances of freedmen's monuments under investigation here.

Brown's concept of "mortuary politics" offers a viable alternative to transcript theory that accounts for the vibrancy of slaves' commemorative cultures and situates these practices in a wider field of activity, alongside those of the freeborn.⁷⁷ As Brown argues in a study of colonial Jamaica, mourning and remembering the dead present opportunities to negotiate power among the living. Mortuary politics entail making claims to legitimacy, mediating authority, and creating and navigating categories like "slave" and "free," on both sides of that legal divide.⁷⁸ The slave system that Brown investigates differs vastly from that of the Roman empire, but his approach illuminates how death facilitates the expression of shared or competing ideas.

The slightly modified idea of "commemorative politics" would even more aptly accommodate the array of media through which inhabitants of the Roman world sought to establish themselves in the common memory.⁷⁹ Latin tombstones regularly bore not only the name of the deceased but also of the persons responsible for overseeing the commission.⁸⁰ Honorific statues and inscribed bases celebrated military achievements, offices, and civic benefactions, especially among the freeborn elite, although not exclusively so. At the highest echelons, literary texts held the promise of transcending death even more effectively than could stone or bronze.⁸¹ Through such modes of commemoration, people and groups at various levels of Roman society made claims to legitimacy and navigated social categories in the process of deciding who and what should be remembered and on what basis.

⁷⁷ Brown (2008).

⁷⁸ Brown (2008: 5–6).

⁷⁹ Carroll (2006: 30–32).

⁸⁰ On tombstones as a vehicle for memory, see Carroll (2006: 18–20, 30–58). On burial culture, see especially Toynbee (1971); Hinard (1987); Morris (1992); von Hesberg (1992); von Hesberg and Zanker (1987); Heinzelmänn (2001).

⁸¹ Literature's role as a vehicle for memory, often set in contrast to the fallibility of physical monuments, was a powerful *topos* in classical antiquity; examples from the Latin tradition include Enn. *Var.* 17–18 Vahlen; Hor. *Carm.* 3.30; Ov. *Met.* 15.871–879; Tac. *Agr.* 46.

Ex-Slaves' Epigraphic Habit

The prominence of *liberti* in funerary inscriptions from Rome and Italy is indicative of ex-slaves' remarkably prolific "epigraphic habit."⁸² Historians debate precisely why freedmen undertook this form of commemoration in such elevated proportions when compared to freeborn civilians. The opportunity to advertise privileges bestowed by freedom and (when applicable) citizenship may have inspired many to arrange for their monument or for that of a close relation.⁸³ However, the tendency to reduce freedmen's burial culture to questions of pride or shame has met with resistance, since it assumes that *liberti* cared exclusively about status and resonates uncomfortably with ancient stereotypes. Other considerations, such as the stability of the family after manumission, have been proposed as driving forces behind ex-slaves' epigraphic habit.⁸⁴ Ultimately, there is no easy answer to this question, and a complex array of factors linked to the social roles and subculture of freedmen would have encouraged members of this group to participate in Roman burial customs en masse.⁸⁵

Although their activities in the funerary realm are most distinctive, freedmen engaged in other types of commemoration that placed them in dialogue with entities like municipal councils, professional guilds (*collegia*), and the imperial cult. Honorific statues and inscriptions that record the euergetism of wealthy citizens, including freed slaves, conferred prestige on the donor and encouraged others to emulate that person's virtues.⁸⁶ Trade guilds provided their slave, freed, and freeborn members with a chance to progress through internal hierarchies that composed a type of institutional *cursus*.⁸⁷ These achievements could in turn be commemorated in civic and burial monuments. Moreover, while not exclusive to freedmen, the municipal organization known as the **Augustales* combined a collegial framework

⁸² This did not prevent certain freedmen from having their successes enshrined in literary texts, e.g. at Stat. *Silv.* 3.3, 3.4, 5.1; Phaed. 2.9; cf. Sen. *Ad Polybium* 2.6.

⁸³ Arguments based on ex-slaves' overwhelming interest in their legal status have been widely accepted; for a recent instance, see Cooley (2012: 54), but many more could be cited; cf. Mouritsen (2011a: 279–284).

⁸⁴ Mouritsen (2005; 2011a: 285–289).

⁸⁵ Beltrán Lloris (2014: 144–145) stresses the complexity of Roman epigraphic culture and cautions against ascribing the rise and fall of the epigraphic habit to a single historical cause.

⁸⁶ Forbis (1996: 1–6, with App. 4).

⁸⁷ Tran (2006a; 2006b: 156–164); Verboven (2007).

with civic benefaction and emperor worship to interact constructively with the urban landscape.⁸⁸

The monuments that ex-slaves commissioned reflect decisions about how to represent themselves and their subjects, as I have already remarked in passing. Literary and epigraphic evidence for this process, although limited, suggests that commemorators typically consulted with a *lapidarius*, perhaps with the assistance of a handbook, to determine the content of their inscription. Iconography could be selected from stock or sculpted to order.⁸⁹ Some extant epitaphs contain puns and other signs of personalization, but the vast majority are formulaic. A generic, non-Christian epitaph on a stele or grave altar from the imperial period might open with a dedication to the *Di Manes*, followed by the name of the deceased, the parties responsible for the burial, their relationship to the commemorand, and an epithet like *bene merens* (“well-deserving”). Despite this predictability, all but the simplest epitaphs reflect a process of selection. Commemorators decided, for example, whether to include age at death and, if the deceased’s birthday were known, with what amount of precision.⁹⁰ The display of professional titles and other biographical data required special attention, as did the words used to describe family ties.

Epigraphic choices are often most significant when they deviate from expectations. It would be unsurprising, for example, to find a *libertus* including his *tria nomina* and commemorating his spouse and freeborn children. Funerary portraits popular among ex-slaves in the Augustan period depict such benefits of manumission in especially vivid terms.⁹¹ When freed commemorators select other information to highlight, the results can be all the more striking. What does it mean, for example, when the same ex-slave decides to identify his spouse as his *contubernalis*? For a preview of this strategy, which I examine in [Chapter 5](#), consider the stele

⁸⁸ Laird (2015); see also Abramenko (1993); Duthoy (1974, 1976, 1978). The term **Augustales* is scholarly shorthand for an organization whose name varied between *Augustales*, *seviri Augustales*, and *seviri*. I use the shorthand when referring to the organization as a whole and the appropriate office when referring to individuals who held it.

⁸⁹ Carroll (2006: 105–108); Cooley (2012: 286–292). The accidental reproduction of epigraphic “blueprints” in *AE* 1931, 112 and *RICG* 15.19 shows that handbooks were used, but does not indicate who chose the formulae. Cooley also cites an epitaph that leaves space for the commemorand’s birth- and death-days (Blant 1892: no. 174); since the deceased’s name is already inscribed, the most likely explanation for the gaps is that the stonemason paused to gather more information and failed to complete the inscription. For the consultation of elite commemorands prior to the erection of honorific monuments, see Eck (2009; 2010b: 143–174).

⁹⁰ On the subjective nature of age at death in Roman funerary epigraphy, see Hopkins (1966, 1987); Shaw (1991); and further discussion in [Chapter 5](#), below.

⁹¹ For portraiture, see especially Zanker (1975); Kleiner (1977); Kockel (1993).

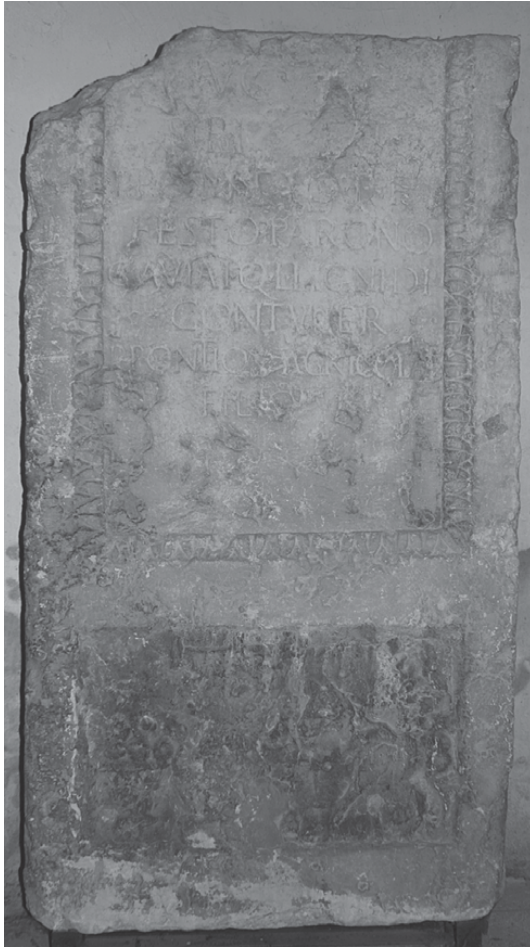


Figure 6 Tomb marker of P. Pontius Iucundus, P. Pontius Festus, Gavia Lyncis, and P. Pontius Agricola; Verona, second century CE.
Photo: Museo Lapidario Maffei.

of a freed baker from Verona, dated to the second half of the first century CE (fig. 6):⁹²

[V(ivus)] f(ecit) | [P(ublius) P]o[n]tius | P(ubli) l(ibertus) Iucu[n]dus |
sibi et | P(ublio) Pontio P(ubli) f(ilio) | Festo patrōno | Gaviai Q(uinti)
l(ibertae) Lyncidi | contuber(nali) | P(ublio) Pontio Agricolae | filio.

⁹² *CIL* 5,3707 = Zimmer 26 = MLM Inv. 28310; Alföldy (1999: 191, no. 5).

P. Pontius Iucundus, freedman of Publius, commissioned this tomb while living, for himself and for P. Pontius Festus, son of Publius, his patron, and for Gavia Lyncis, freedwoman of Quintus, his *contubernalis*; and for P. Pontius Agricola, his son.

Iucundus chose to identify his wife as his *contubernalis*, a word typically applied to *de facto* marriages between slaves in slavery.⁹³ While other explanations are possible, one reason for the variety of *nomina* in this family may be that Iucundus and Lyncis formed their union while slaves in different households. Agricola could have been purchased by his father's master and manumitted, purchased by his own father, or born when both parents were free. In a commemorative setting where *coniunx* or *uxor* would have imbued the conjugal relationship with an air of legitimacy, *contubernalis* marks the endurance of that bond over time. The fact that such variations were symbolically possible, even if they were uncommon, indicates the sophistication of freedmen's epigraphic strategies, which could react dynamically to social norms.

My treatment of the epigraphic material is qualitative, rather than quantitative. I seek out meaningful combinations of elements and deviations from expected formulae that would be difficult to identify by compiling data from large numbers of inscriptions. The significance of these qualitative analyses is then appraised on the basis of existing studies that have used robust datasets to shed light on ex-slaves' family structure, naming practices, and commemorative patterns. Most of these samples number in the thousands, whereas others have produced compelling results from local corpora of a few hundred inscriptions.⁹⁴ I rely on this research to contextualize my own findings but take a different approach, one which privileges detailed exposition of specific examples rather than the extraction of data. Chapter 2, for instance, examines a small collection of thirty-five epitaphs from Rome and Italy that contain the word *fama*. Chapter 4 reconsiders the implications of well-documented trends in the

⁹³ Rawson (1974); Treggiari (1981); Perry (2014: 40–41).

⁹⁴ Large-scale studies with implications for freedmen include Rawson (1966), an analysis of about 1,500 inscriptions commemorating families in *CIL* 6. Huttunen (1974) studies a sample of 5,092 Latin epitaphs from *CIL* 6. Sigismund Nielsen (1997) treats a sample of 3,797 epitaphs from *CIL* 6 that contain emotive epithets. Joshel (1992) considers 1,470 individuals from Rome with occupational titles. Saller and Shaw (1984) assess relationships attested in an empire-wide sample of over 25,000; but see the critique of their methodology by Martin (1996). Mouritsen's (2004) study of 383 funerary inscriptions from Ostia evaluates freedmen's epigraphic habit; see also Mouritsen (2005). Like local corpora, those that address a particular subgroup are self-limiting, such as the collection of over 4,000 inscriptions attesting members of the *familia Caesaris* or the roughly 250 pairs of *contubernales* at Rome studied by Rawson (1974) and Treggiari (1981).

epigraphy of the *familia Caesaris* but also explores noteworthy cases from both literature and inscriptions.⁹⁵ Chapter 5 presents a series of modest epigraphic corpora in which commemorators use various frameworks to establish continuity between slavery and freedom in the freed life course.

Compared to the tens of thousands of inscriptions that attest *liberti* across the Roman empire, such collections seem miniscule. They are not representative samples but corpora designed to shed light on a particular strategy or set of themes. Nevertheless, there is much to be gained from balancing these analyses against quantitative work that has already been done, as well as against the literary sources.⁹⁶ I endeavor to interpret strategies used in the monuments of freedmen and circumscribed groups of freedmen in ways that draw on and connect with larger studies. To this end, for example, my discussion of epitaphs that refer explicitly to *fama* brings together insights about the roles of work, patronage, and familial stability in freedmen's burial culture.⁹⁷ Studying epitaphs individually shows how these concerns might intersect to shape an ex-slave's persona. Likewise, strategies that construct unity in the freed life course align with an onomastic pattern whereby former slaves passed Greek names to their children to emphasize the endurance of a family line.⁹⁸

In turn, literary representations of freedmen help to assess what Roman aristocrats knew about this subculture and, by extension, what strategies they could plausibly have adapted from it. As the correspondences between Eurysaces' tomb and Trimalchio's mural suggest, Petronius parodies the impetus among wealthy *liberti* to trace their present successes back to actions taken in captivity. The mural scene suggests that Petronius' audience would have associated this type of claim with ex-slaves and, more specifically, with their burial culture. As I argue further in Chapter 3, reading Petronius alongside the epigraphic record can provide a reasonably secure indication of what an aristocrat in Neronian Rome would have known about the commemorative practices of *liberti*, albeit under the influence of elite biases and ideological commitments.

⁹⁵ Large-scale studies include Weaver (1972); Herrmann-Otto (1994).

⁹⁶ On the benefits of studying individual inscriptions for biographical elements, see e.g. Bodel (2001: 39–41); Carroll (2006: 24–25); Corbier (2005: 262–268); Beard (1997). A productive balance is established by Borbonus (2014: 106–134) and by Joshel (1992) in discussions of specific examples and subgroups against the background of quantitative analyses.

⁹⁷ With particular reference to Joshel (1992); George (2005, 2006); Mouritsen (2004, 2005); Sigismund Nielsen (1997).

⁹⁸ Mouritsen (2011a: 283, 287–288), interpreting Solin (1971).

The monuments proffered for close analysis come mainly from published collections for Rome and the Augustan *regiones*, although inscriptions from sites farther afield are cited when relevant.⁹⁹ This geographical concentration stems in part from the fact that *liberti* and their epigraphic habit were especially prominent at the core of the empire, but also from my intention to examine freedmen's influence on segments of the elite whose cultural focus was the city of Rome. Most Latin epitaphs can be dated, at best, to a span of several decades, very often only to within a century or half-century.¹⁰⁰ The majority of dateable inscriptions included here range from the end of the first century BCE to the late second or early third century CE, with outliers cited as such. Thematic corpora that encompass wide spatial and temporal boundaries necessarily obscure both local variation and chronological change. This may be alleviated somewhat by consistencies regarding freedmen's place in society under the principate.¹⁰¹ However, changes in commemorative practices after Augustus and the emergence of an imperial bureaucracy are crucial diachronic developments that both involved ex-slaves and intersected with the transformation of elite culture in response to a new political system.

Another methodological challenge relates to the treatment of inscribed monuments as physical objects that interacted with their surroundings. Recent work on the epigraphic culture of Roman freedmen, as well as of other groups, has emphasized the need to view such monuments in their totality, both as physical artifacts and as bearers of text.¹⁰² My analyses are based mainly on inscriptions' written content and commemorators' choice of words or phrases, but I take iconography and other material features into account to the extent possible. Still, detailed information about original find site is often unavailable, and most examples are presented as text or simply as *CIL* or *AE* numbers. One cannot exclude the possibility

⁹⁹ The eleven *regiones* introduced by Augustus (Plin. *HN* 3.5.46) are used for convenience to approximate the Italian core of the empire, but cf. Dench (2005: 200–201) on the districts' apparently limited impact on cultural conceptions of Italy. Epigraphic evidence was gathered using online databases that offer search capabilities, namely those housed by EAGLE (www.eagle-network.eu) and the Epigraphik Datenbank Claus-Slaby (www.manfredclaus.de/gb/index.html). Print indices for *CIL* 6, 10, and 14 were also consulted. For brevity's sake, lists of inscriptions in the notes have been pared down to one or two editions per item, usually a *CIL* or *AE* number.

¹⁰⁰ On dating, see Bodel (2001: 49–52); Cooley (2012: 409); Carroll (2006: 26–27). The *familia Caesaris* sometimes proffers better data; see Weaver (1972: 17–92) on onomastic guidelines.

¹⁰¹ Mouritsen (2011a: 9).

¹⁰² Exemplary studies of this approach in recent scholarship include, in different respects, Laird (2015) and Borbonus (2014).

that visual and contextual factors would have enhanced or even altered significantly the messages being conveyed.

Sites of Engagement

The audiences for ex-slaves' epigraphic monuments warrant further discussion. Select freedmen achieved sufficient standing to earn an honorific statue and inscription, usually through acts of euergetism that received official recognition. However, tombs also had a public dimension, in addition to serving the needs of the deceased's family and generations of mourners.¹⁰³ In particular, the burials that lined thoroughfares in and out of Roman cities have been described as the "most public of private monuments."¹⁰⁴ In a frequently cited passage, Varro connects the noun "monument" (*monimentum*) to the verb "to warn" (*monere*) because, according to his logic, roadside memorials "admonish" passers-by of their own mortality.¹⁰⁵ Relegated by law to the suburbs, such tombs might appeal directly to travelers, for example by asking them to stop and read the inscription or by offering a bench where the weary might rest.¹⁰⁶

Although Roman authors acknowledge the importance of preserving memory after death, some depict necropoleis as marginal spaces, frequented by prostitutes and thieves or used for shelter in times of crisis.¹⁰⁷ Others praise the worthiness of a humble tombstone or debate whether a monument is even necessary, provided that one's achievements are distinguished enough to be handed down to posterity by other means.¹⁰⁸ These concerns may be paralleled in the material record by a decline in the number of elite tombs during the first century CE, both at Rome and in municipal Italy.¹⁰⁹ At Pompeii, where extramural necropoleis were preserved in their current state by the eruption of Vesuvius in 79, many decurions received only a modest burial or none at all.¹¹⁰ The younger Pliny remarks that both seeking and rejecting an epitaph belie a desire to enhance one's reputation.¹¹¹ However, by the second century, Italian aristocrats appear to

¹⁰³ Hope (2003a: 122; 2009b: 153).

¹⁰⁴ Koortbojian (1996: 225); see also Purcell (1987).

¹⁰⁵ *Ling. Lat.* 6.49.

¹⁰⁶ Koortbojian (1996); Carroll (2006: 48–53).

¹⁰⁷ Mart. *Ep.* 1.34, 3.82; Juv. 5.55, 6.016; App. *BCiv.* 4.36; Luc. 2.152–153; Suet. *Ner.* 38.2.

¹⁰⁸ E.g. Sen. *Ep.* 91.16, *Dial.* 10.15.4; Plin. *Ep.* 9.19; Tac. *Hist.* 2.49; Juv. 10.143–146.

¹⁰⁹ Mouritsen (2005); Hope (2009b: 162–165).

¹¹⁰ Mouritsen (2005: 45–50).

¹¹¹ Plin. *Ep.* 9.19.8.

have stopped building new monuments in favor of other, more prestigious forms of display.

That being said, casual encounters with tombs were a familiar occurrence, even at the very top of the social pyramid. Suetonius reports that Nero, returning to Rome after Vindex revolted in Gaul, “noticed sculpted on a monument a Gallic soldier who had been defeated by a Roman cavalryman and was being dragged by the hair.”¹¹² Nero foolishly interpreted this iconography as a positive omen. By contrast, during a sojourn at Capri, Augustus saw rites being celebrated at the tomb of his slave and wittily recast the gathering as Greek hero cult.¹¹³ Tales about emperors’ reactions to low-status graves are meant to exemplify personal characteristics, rather than to describe a historical event, but these stories assume that a *princeps* would have seen and interacted with such monuments. Similarly, in a famous letter to which I will return shortly, Pliny purports to have “just recently noticed” the tomb of Pallas, an imperial freedman, on the Via Tiburtina.¹¹⁴ Pliny may well have known about the site already.¹¹⁵ However, the image of a Roman aristocrat happening upon a freedman’s monument could not have been so outlandish as to undermine his rhetorical purpose.

Graveside rituals drew people into suburban necropoleis, beyond what could be seen from the road. Texts from the late republic through the fifth century CE consistently suggest that non-Christian Romans honored their ancestral *Di Manes* during the Parentalia.¹¹⁶ Some testators charged freedmen with maintaining both the tomb and its cult, but that arrangement did not necessarily preclude contributions by family members.¹¹⁷ Moreover, after the construction of elite tombs declined, members of the upper social strata may have continued to bury their dead in existing tombs or transferred sites between families.¹¹⁸ The Tomb of the Scipios, whose heyday ended in the second century BCE, maintained its connection to the family for generations, and Gaetulicus (cos. 26 CE) even decided to bury his daughter and grandson there.¹¹⁹

¹¹² Suet. *Ner.* 41.2.

¹¹³ Suet. *Aug.* 98.4. On the implications of this passage for Augustus’ own role as a founder, see Wardle (2014: *ad loc.*). Cf. Suet. *Calig.* 3.2 on Germanicus’ performance of obsequies whenever he noticed the tomb of an illustrious man.

¹¹⁴ Plin. *Ep.* 7.29.2; cf. Plin. *HN* 35.58.201.

¹¹⁵ Leach (2013: 130–131).

¹¹⁶ Dolansky (2011). See Gee (2008: 65–68) and Petersen (2006: 213) on the public aspects of rituals performed at tombs, even if interior spaces were normally closed to passers-by.

¹¹⁷ Toynebee (1971: 63).

¹¹⁸ Mouritsen (2005: 51). Cf. Vell. Pat. 2.119.2 on the burial of Varus’ remains in his family’s tomb.

¹¹⁹ *ILS* 958, 959.

Under certain circumstances, freeborn aristocrats may have purposefully visited the tomb of a slave or *libertus*, whether the deceased came from their own household or from the wider community. Statius describes elaborate funerary rites for *pueri delicati* and freedmen of various backgrounds, including Glaucias, whose patron and parents mourn the boy together.¹²⁰ While such *topoi* hardly translate into actual practice, they are echoed by select epitaphs dedicated by masters to favorite slaves.¹²¹ More concretely, at Misenum in the middle of the second century CE, an *Augustalis* named Q. Cominius Abascantus provided for a wrestling match to be performed at his tomb during the Parentalia, along with a banquet in the *triclinium* for the curators of the *Augustales* and the town's *duoviri*.¹²² Descendants of ex-slaves who rose to decurional status or higher may also have returned to the graves of their freed progenitors to observe annual rites.¹²³

On the grounds of archaeological remains and occasional literary references, it is reasonable to suppose that members of the elite came into contact with the monuments of *liberti*, especially (but not limited to) tombs erected along the road. However, over the course of the first century CE, the public orientation of Roman funerary architecture seems to have shifted toward a focus on interior spaces.¹²⁴ Epitaphs placed inside group tombs, as well as inside funerary enclosures, would have been hidden from public view. A plaque embedded in the façade of a monument might announce the size of the plot, its terms of use, and the names of the occupants; inside, individual inscriptions marked burial niches, cinerary urns, or sarcophagi. Although this trend was by no means universal, even within the same site, it raises the question of whether such interior epitaphs could have communicated with a wider audience than the deceased's immediate family, close associates, and descendants.¹²⁵

On the one hand, the decision to inscribe one's name in stone was driven by a "sense of audience" that encompassed the community and posterity at large.¹²⁶ Although the content and form of inscriptions varied according

¹²⁰ Stat. *Silv.* 2.1; on the ambiguous status of Glaucias, see Bernstein (2005).

¹²¹ E.g. CIL 14.472 = ILS 775; CIL 13.8355 = ILS 7756; Lattimore (1942: 280–285).

¹²² D'Arms (2000); Laird (2015: 184–187).

¹²³ On the upward mobility of ex-slaves' freeborn progeny see Gordon (1931); Eck (1999); López Barja de Quiroga (1995); Mouritsen (2011a: 261–278); cf. hyperbolic, but perhaps not entirely untrue statements at Tac. *Ann.* 13.26–27; Juv. 8.45.

¹²⁴ Von Hesberg (1992: 42–45); Hope (2009b: 162–163); cf. Borbonus (2014) on the link between *columbaria* and social and political developments during the Augustan period.

¹²⁵ The distinction between internal and external burial inscriptions is emphasized by Wallace-Hadrill (2008b); Mouritsen (2011a: 281); Borbonus (2014: 40–48).

¹²⁶ MacMullen (1982: 246).

to setting, they shared the basic function of addressing an imaginary collective, in addition to more specific audiences.¹²⁷ Furthermore, separating public from private epitaphs can be problematic. At Ostia, it has been estimated that one in three *tituli* contains none of the elements on which such a classification is normally based, for example a formula indicating the inclusion of freed slaves and their descendants in the tomb (*libertis libertabusque posterisque eorum*) or a notation of the plot's dimensions.¹²⁸ The difficulty of identifying *tituli* on the basis of internal evidence creates a methodological quandary when epitaphs have not been documented *in situ*. At the same time, this problem speaks to commonalities in content and phrasing among public and private – or, more precisely, external and internal – funerary inscriptions. Many *tituli* cite bonds of kinship and emotive epithets alongside references to size, ownership, and occupancy.¹²⁹ Personal expressions of attachment and loss seem equally suited to a general audience as to family members and close relations; some of the most plaintive epitaphs from Roman antiquity implore passers-by to stop and read about the deceased, even to weep on his behalf.¹³⁰

On the other hand, of course, interior epitaphs reached a far smaller number of viewers than did those mounted on a façade or inscribed on a freestanding, publicly visible tombstone. Even fewer of the people likely to enter a burial complex occupied by slaves and freedmen would have belonged to the upper orders. However, the case of Q. Cominius Abascantus warns against drawing too rigid a boundary between public and private in second-century tombs. The performance of wrestling matches would have attracted members of the *populus* to the site, and feasts for *Augustales* and *duoviri* brought freed and freeborn citizens together inside the *tablinum*, even if the interior chamber remained closed. Moreover, for people less accomplished than Abascantus, establishing a family tomb and attending funereal rites still had a public dimension, because these acts expressed one's belonging to a *familia* and to the community at large.¹³¹ Considering these ambiguities, I have not excluded inscriptions whose

¹²⁷ Panciera (2012: 4).

¹²⁸ Mouritsen (2004; 2005: 40).

¹²⁹ Instances of this phenomenon include tomb markers that both cite dimensions and commemorate one or more occupants as *carissimus/-a*, e.g. *CIL* 6.37542, 20247, 22561, 9567, 10526, 11569, 12428, 14514, 17549, 20465, 20788, 21316, 25834; 14.667, 1636, 4855, 4663, 5168, 5208; *AE* 1977, 98, *AE* 1980, 133, *AE* 2001, 364. Petersen (2006: 203–210) discusses an exceptional case at Isola Sacra in which *tituli* were installed contemporaneously on the walls of the outer enclosure and inner chamber.

¹³⁰ Lattimore (1942: 230–237).

¹³¹ E.g. Petersen (2006: 215–225).

form or find site suggests an interior setting. If such texts employ strategies of representation that match those found in *tituli* – or, for that matter, in honorific and votive inscriptions – it follows that the strategies in question were sufficiently flexible to address different types of viewer.¹³²

The social lens through which aristocrats perceived ex-slaves' monuments presents an additional challenge. Some Roman authors object vociferously to funerary and civic monuments felt to be excessive or incongruous with a servile background. Pliny's response to Pallas' monument shows how elite biases shaped the processes of viewing a monument and reading its inscription.¹³³ In his first letter on the subject, mentioned briefly above, Pliny ridicules the roadside monument, which celebrates the freedman's receipt of praetorian *ornamenta* "on account of his fidelity and loyalty toward his patrons" and, even worse, refusal of 15 million sesterces offered along with the title. A second letter, in which Pliny cites the actual decree, condemns the Claudian Senate for obsequious behavior. He bristles at the senators' decision to inscribe Pallas' honors in bronze to be displayed "in a heavily trafficked place, where they could be read by both contemporaries and future generations."¹³⁴

Pliny's indignation represents one common response to the status dissonance generated by powerful freedmen and, from an elite point of view, instantiated by their ostentatious tombs.¹³⁵ Yet other reactions were possible. Statius crafts an elaborate account of the burial that T. Flavius Abascantus, chief secretary (*ab epistulis*) under Domitian, arranged for his wife Priscilla.¹³⁶ At the same time as Statius offers the poem as a literary monument to outlast any physical effigy, he describes Priscilla's monument in lavish detail.¹³⁷ The poet carefully controls the stereotype of the *nouveau riche* freedman by coopting the funeral's internal audience:¹³⁸

... hac merito visa pietate mariti
protinus exclames: "est hic, agnosco, minister

¹³² On the capacity of votive inscriptions to communicate with a human, as well as a divine audience, see Beard (1991); Rüpke (2016: 133–134).

¹³³ Plin. *Ep.* 7.29, 8.6; cf. Tac. *Ann.* 12.53.

¹³⁴ Plin. *Ep.* 8.6.14.

¹³⁵ Burials figured centrally in this *topos*, as attested by Plin. *Ep.* 7.29 and 8.6; Plin. *HN* 33.47.135; Petron. *Sat.* 71. Cf. Hor. *Sat.* 2.84–99 on the tomb of Staberius. For the concept of "status dissonance" created by successful *liberti*, see Hopkins (1965).

¹³⁶ Stat. *Silv.* 5.1. Priscilla was probably a member of the freeborn elite (5.1.53); however, this would not have prevented a negative interpretation of her freed husband's burial practices (as proven by Plin. *HN* 34.6.12).

¹³⁷ Stat. *Silv.* 5.1.1–15, 222–246.

¹³⁸ Stat. *Silv.* 5.1.238–241; Gibson (2015: 132–133).

illius, aeternae modo qui sacraria genti
condidit inque alio posuit sua sidera caelo.”

Having seen this display of piety by her husband, deservedly you might exclaim at once: “This is, I see, the minister of that man who recently founded a temple for his eternal race and set his own stars in another heaven.”

These lines identify Abascantus’ efforts to commemorate his wife as a demonstration of *pietas*, rather than as a crass show of wealth.¹³⁹ To complete the image, Statius associates Abascantus with the *princeps*, a relationship which defines the political system that underwrites this ex-slave’s prosperity.¹⁴⁰

It is tempting to see Pliny’s response as sincere and to dismiss both the Claudian Senate and Statius for currying favor with a high-ranking freedman. Gestures directed toward *liberti Augusti*, whether an official decree or an occasional poem, were implicated in the web of power and patronage that surrounded the Roman emperor. But this misses the larger point. As one historian has astutely observed, “monumentalizing was a way of making claims about the world, claims which might be challenged, just as Pliny challenges the claims made about Pallas’ worth, but public claims nonetheless.”¹⁴¹ Peering back into an earlier era, which he contrasts with his own, Pliny is keen to reject the idea that someone like Pallas could offer a positive *exemplum* to posterity. Nevertheless, for both Pliny and Statius, interpreting ex-slaves’ commemorative culture allowed members of the elite to examine social and political questions of intense concern to themselves.

Summary of the Argument

Each chapter investigates a dimension of the exchange between freed slaves and the Roman elite during the early principate. In [Chapter 2](#), I suggest that traditionally servile qualities like *fides*, *obsequium*, and *industria* gained traction among aristocrats thanks in part to models produced by ex-slaves. I analyze monuments in which *liberti* balanced professional skill against normative virtues to attain immortality in the common memory. These freedmen transformed the expectations of slave-owners into personal qualities that would cast themselves or their memoranda in a positive light. Moderation in the pursuit and celebration of glory was an effective

¹³⁹ Gibson (2015: 132).

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Hulls (2011) on Stat. *Silv.* 3.3.

¹⁴¹ Woolf (1996: 27); see also Leach (2013).

strategy in political contexts where success could be a threat to the *princeps*. I argue that ex-slaves' approach to commemoration helped aristocrats to address the problem of how to achieve honor under a monarch. Moreover, viewed through the lens of the Pauline epistles, early Christian thought established a comparable link between humility and eternal life by means of the metaphors of slavery and liberation.

Chapter 3 presents a series of case studies that assess in greater detail the extent of the elite's engagement of freed culture. Unlike the metaphor of spiritual slavery, the language and iconography of manumission in Roman political discourse rarely accounts for the patron–freedman relationship. Nevertheless, the emperor's role as a patron brought his elite subjects into alignment with former slaves, especially those in the *familia Caesaris*. Further investigation of the literary sources indicates that not only were aristocrats aware of the strategies used by freed slaves, they were capable of applying these models to their own circumstances. Whereas Petronius sets a baseline for what imperial aristocrats can be expected to have known about ex-slaves' commemorative practices, Horace and Seneca exemplify the process of identifying constructively with this subordinate group. The appearance of Phaedrus' *Fables* in the first century CE provides an even stronger indication that slave and freed culture had become relevant to the elite as it adjusted to the rise of monarchy.

Chapter 4 ascribes to the *familia Caesaris* a central place in the dialogue between freed and aristocratic cultures during this period. The practice of using private slaves and *liberti* to transact public business originated in the republic but was institutionalized by the Julio-Claudians. Members of the emperor's slave and freed staff became talismanic of monarchy, not only through literary representations but also as a result of claims that they made via funerary and honorific monuments. After returning briefly to the figure of Pallas, I analyze a range of literary texts and epigraphic trends to ask what precisely members of the elite could have learned from *liberti Augusti*. The vehement rhetoric of Tacitus and Pliny is weighed against positive, even encomiastic, portraits of imperial freedmen by authors like Seneca and Statius.

In Chapter 5, I turn from virtues related to patronage and other forms of dependency to ask how *liberti* organized biographical data to signal continuity and change in the individual life course. Some freed commemorators look toward alternative sources of meaning – including personal relationships and religious cult – to construct their life stories or those of their memorands as unified wholes. Drawing in part on this model, certain members of the elite sought to reevaluate traditional

measures of personal progress. For aristocratic men under the principate, public life provided a dominant frame of reference, whereas for freedmen, the ideology of slave-owning imposed manumission as a definitive point of transition. Yet Stoic and early Christian thinkers began to envision a spiritual life course according to alternative measures that diverged from conventional frameworks like the *cursus honorum*. Metaphors of slavery and freedom signpost these texts' deployment of strategies adapted at least in part from below.

As Buckland remarked in *The Roman Law of Slavery*, first published at the beginning of the twentieth century, "there is scarcely a problem which can present itself, in any branch of the law, the solution of which may not be affected by the fact that one of the parties to the transaction is a slave, and, outside the region of procedure, there are few branches of the law in which the slave does not prominently appear."¹⁴² Speaking in broader historical terms, Finley observed that "there was no action or belief or institution in Graeco-Roman antiquity that was not one way or other affected by the possibility that someone involved *might be* a slave."¹⁴³ The present study expands on these insights as they apply to Roman cultural history by exploring the pervasive impact of freedmen in the early empire. Patterson has argued that *liberti* profoundly influenced Roman values in this period by advancing a notion of personal freedom that was adopted by the lower orders, as well as by the elite.¹⁴⁴ Although I disagree with certain aspects of his assessment, his acknowledgment of ex-slaves' contributions to the development of Western thought remains fundamental. *Liberti* represent only one level of the Roman status hierarchy, and their impact on the transformation of aristocratic values coalesced with myriad other factors. Yet freedmen's role in social and political life placed them in an advantageous position to alter the pathways along which certain practices took shape. Understanding these processes in more detail has the potential to shed new light on the ways in which Roman culture evolved in the crucible of the Roman slave system.

¹⁴² Buckland (1908: v).

¹⁴³ Finley (1998: 133).

¹⁴⁴ Patterson (1991: 245).

Achieving Immortality under the Principate

In a world with conflicting views of the afterlife, high mortality rates, and intense competition for honor and resources, establishing oneself in the common memory was a coveted goal for many people. Monuments – whether literary or epigraphic – provided a vehicle for this type of immortality.¹ Although commemoration in literature was reserved primarily for the elite, funerary inscriptions promised to safeguard the names of those from less distinguished backgrounds. Anyone with sufficient funds to afford a gravestone could participate in the commemorative politics of imperial Rome, if only by securing a niche and simple plaque in a group tomb.² That freedmen did so in such elevated proportions speaks to their vibrant burial culture. Despite the restrictions imposed by formulae and other conventions, freed commemorators made choices about the form and content of monuments that in turn expressed social claims.

The ways in which Romans represented themselves and each other in commemorative contexts were conditioned by social and political forces. Even “new men” like Cicero could try to secure renown by demonstrating *honor* and *virtus*, whereas most slaves and freedmen necessarily looked to other sources of meaning, such as work and family. In the introductory chapter, my interpretation of Eurysaces’ tomb previewed two strategies that ex-slaves implemented in their burial culture – namely, combining industry with normative virtues and creating links with the servile past. This chapter treats in greater detail how freedmen integrated claims to vocational skill with the performance of ideals imposed from above, including loyalty and obedience toward patrons and personal traits like honesty and restraint of ambition. For freed artisans and traders, as well as

¹ Carroll (2006: 30–32). See e.g. Cic. *Arch.* 9, *Fam.* 5.12.6; Plin. *HN* 2.63.154; cf. Plin. *Ep.* 3.21.6; Tac. *Agr.* 1.1–2, 46. For the tomb as an eternal residence, see e.g. *CIL* 1².1930, 6.6314, 10.8220, 11.6249; Lattimore (1942: 165–167).

² Carroll (2006: 24–25); Toynbee (1971: 61–62).

for domestic staff, striking a balance between deference and productivity provided one route to achieving a positive reputation in death.

This approach to commemoration offered a potential model for elite behavior under the principate, when monarchy redefined the channels through which high-ranking men pursued glory.³ After Rome's political system transformed with the rise of Augustus, the *princeps* essentially controlled the distribution of honor among the senatorial and equestrian orders. Most visibly, the emperor held a monopoly over the commemoration of military victory and other public displays of achievement in the capital city.⁴ Particularly under "bad" emperors, but also during moderate regimes, cultivating proper levels of obedience alongside more traditional virtues could support and protect a successful career. In this chapter and the next, I argue that texts like Tacitus' *Agricola* suggest that members of the elite appropriated strategies from freed culture to help identify new avenues through which they might win lasting fame.

Roman authors derived moral and behavioral *exempla* from a range of social groups, political figures, and relationships, including slaves, women, and the *princeps* himself.⁵ My concentration on freedmen is not meant to imply that ex-slaves were alone in providing models for aristocratic behavior, but rather to highlight one dimension of a broader, more complex process. In particular, as the case of *Agricola* will show, military discipline constituted another rubric under which members of the elite sought to accommodate the disparity in power that they faced with respect to the emperor. So, too, did relationships between fathers and sons and between patrons and freeborn clients.⁶ Adding ex-slaves to this array of paradigms and influences does not detract from the importance of others. That being said, freedmen's investment in the production of funerary monuments recommends this group as a source for new commemorative strategies that aristocrats might apply to their own situation.

A coda to my main argument addresses the relationship between servile virtues and immortality in early Christian thought. At the same time

³ For helpful discussions of the relationship between monarchy and elite political culture, see Roller (2001: 6–10); Sailor (2008: 10–35); Rowe (2002); Noreña (2011: 1–14). Syme (2002: 440–524) remains fundamental.

⁴ Dio Cass. 54.24.7–8; Eck (1984: 136–143); cf. Beard (2007: 296–305).

⁵ Slaves: Fitzgerald (2000: 69–86). Slaves and women: Parker (1998); Langlands (2006: 78–191). *Principes*: Vell. Pat. 2.126.4; Plin. *Panegyricus* 45.6; Lowrie (2007). On exemplarity in Roman culture, see also Polyb. 6.54; Cic. *Arch.* 6; Livy *Praef.* 10; Hölkeskamp (1996); Roller (2004); Stemmler (2000); Kraus (2005b); Langlands (2015).

⁶ Roller (2001: 233–247) discusses the representation of the emperor as father and master. See Saller (1982: 32–78) for the system of imperial patronage, with further discussion below, in Chapter 3.

as the aristocracy strove to negotiate the relationship between ruler and subject, Christianity splintered from Judaism and spread throughout the Mediterranean. In this context, the Apostle Paul (or Saul) used metaphors of slavery and freedom to demarcate a spiritual path to salvation and eternal life. The images of liberation from sin and enslavement to God or Christ in Paul's epistles resonate with freedmen's epigraphic practices, which Paul would have encountered in his travels and with which many of his constituents would have been intimately familiar. Although the Italian elite did not convert to Christianity in substantial numbers until the fourth and fifth centuries CE, Pauline metaphors indicate that the distance between traditional Roman and Christian virtues was already beginning to narrow.

Behavioral Norms for Ex-Slaves

Elite expectations of proper behavior from freedmen were often conveyed in terms of personal qualities. Most important were deference (*obsequium*) and loyalty (*fides*), both of which focused on ex-slaves' obligations to former masters and functioned best in conjunction with diligence (*industria*).⁷ Juridical sources use *obsequium* in a general way to describe the deference owed by freedmen toward their patrons.⁸ A number of related words – for instance, *reverentia*, *officium*, *modestia*, and *pietas* – identified modes of conduct deemed appropriate for *liberti*.⁹ This insistence on fidelity and obedience went hand in hand with a demand for industriousness and occupational skill.¹⁰ Such prescriptions ensured that patrons would benefit from their freedmen's labor, thereby promoting slave-owners' economic interests together with their social ascendancy.

Behavioral norms reinforced such practical regulations as the restriction of freedmen's ability to bring legal action against a patron.¹¹ Roman law shored up patrons' authority in a number of ways, in particular by requiring *liberti* to fulfill contractual obligations (*operae*) and to demonstrate *obsequium*. But these juridical measures were far from comprehensive. Despite enjoying certain privileges, patrons did not hold formally specified power over ex-slaves. The cultural paradigms of the "good" and "bad" *libertus* therefore provided a necessary supplement to other instruments of

⁷ Mouritsen (2011a: 51–65); Treggiari (1969: 81); Patterson (1982: 243); Fabre (1981: 224–238).

⁸ Dig. 37.15, 38.2.1.1; see e.g. Watson (1967: 227–229); Gardner (1993: 23–25).

⁹ On *pietas*, see Gardner (1993: 23–24).

¹⁰ Mouritsen (2011a: 61), with examples.

¹¹ Gardner (1993: 24).

control.¹² Literary portrayals of freedmen who either transgress or abide by the bounds of their status helped to perpetuate normative types, according to which elite Romans perceived *liberti* as loyal dependents and productive members of the community or as threats to the social order.

Virtues like *fides* and *obsequium* applied to many kinds of relationship. They governed interactions between masters and slaves, children and parents, wives and husbands, soldiers and commanders, patrons and clients, emperors and subjects, and friends. The reciprocal quality of *fides* was integral to the structure of patronage among freeborn citizens, as well as to Roman political ideology throughout the republic and empire.¹³ Similarly, a section of the *Digest* that treats obligations based on *obsequium* unites parental and patronal authority under the heading “On obedience owed to parents and patrons” (*De obsequiis parentibus et patronis praestandis*).¹⁴ The Latin proverb “obedience makes friends, truth makes enmity” (*obsequium amicos, veritas odium parit*) shows neatly how *obsequium* might describe interactions between peers, despite its association with servility.¹⁵

In light of such linguistic overlap, it has been suggested that the Romans lacked a moral vocabulary that was specific to freedmen.¹⁶ However, the meaning of concepts like loyalty and obedience relies heavily on social context, and patterns and combinations are often more telling than are individual instances. Mouritsen concludes from a survey of the literary evidence that:¹⁷

The construction of specific libertine qualities reflected the notion that [ex-slaves] realized their potential for virtue differently from freeborn male citizens; essentially it happened through fidelity and hard work rather than valor and independent action. Modesty, discipline, and obedience were their fundamental qualities, and striving for those virtues that were reserved for the freeborn, especially those related to war and politics, meant going beyond the natural limits entailed by their separate nature.

Liberti were subject to an imbalance of power that they had originally entered against their will. Their subordination to a patron was rooted in the servile past, which altered a person’s capacity for honor and virtue

¹² Mouritsen (2011a: 53–59); on the paradigms of the “good” and “bad” freedman, see also Fabre (1981: 232–241); Joshel (2011: 216–223).

¹³ On *fides* and republican political values, see Hellegouarc’h (1963: esp. 23–40); on *fides* and the origins of patronage vis-à-vis those of manumission, see Rouland (1979: 95–107).

¹⁴ *Dig.* 37.15. On *pietas* and *obsequium* in the family, see Saller (1994: 102–114); Gardner (1993: 23–25).

¹⁵ *Ter. Andr.* 68; cf. *Cic. Amic.* 88–89; on the history of the proverb, see N’Diaye (2005).

¹⁶ Blänsdorf (2001); see also the work of Vermote.

¹⁷ Mouritsen (2011a: 61–64); quotation from p. 64.

in the eyes of the slave-owning elite. While manumission brought some measure of independence, it left the *libertus* indebted to his former owner and subject both to social stigma and to various types of coercion.¹⁸

Many of the qualities required of freedmen by patrons were identical to those required of slaves, a correlation which speaks to the proximity of these two statuses in Roman thought, as well as to the nature of patronage. Despite the clarity of the boundary between slavery and freedom in Roman law and social structure, aristocrats associated slaves and *liberti* closely with one another. Referring to a freed slave as *servus* was a relatively common form of invective.¹⁹ Cicero calls Sulla's freedman Chrysogonus a "most worthless slave," and Pliny uses the same technique to express his outrage about Pallas.²⁰ Cicero can also refer to a trusted freedman as *servus* without pejorative overtones, but neither usage is neutral; both reflect the imbalance between patrons and *liberti*.²¹

Like the "good" freedman, the "good" slave embodied loyalty, obedience, and industriousness in the performance of labor. Valerius Maximus features a series of *exempla* under the heading "On the loyalty of slaves" (*De fide servorum*). Tellingly, he includes among these episodes the tale of Pindarus, a recently manumitted slave who killed his patron, C. Cassius, then committed suicide after Philippi.²² The fact that Cassius had granted Pindarus his freedom does not alter the meaning of the tale. When Macrobius reviews the virtues that one might find in a "servile heart" (*servile pectus*) he also relates stories about both slaves and *liberti*.²³ In their role as positive and negative *exempla* for certain moral principles, freedmen retained attributes from enslavement, although the conditions in which they expressed them had changed.

In addition, paradigms of the "good" and "bad" *libertus* could address problems for which exemplary slaves would have been less appropriate. Most of these issues revolve around freedmen's ability to accumulate wealth and to achieve some degree of upward social mobility. The "good" *libertus* was not only loyal to his patron but also moderate in the pursuit and display of financial gain. According to the elder Pliny, a freedman named P. Catienus Philotimus "loved his patron so much that he threw himself on that man's funeral pyre, despite having been left heir to the entire

¹⁸ On freedom as a gift that carried the expectation of gratitude, see Patterson (1982: 209–247).

¹⁹ Treggiari (1969: 265–266); Lavan (2013: 151).

²⁰ Cic. *Pro Rosc.* 48.140; Plin. *Ep.* 8.6.4.

²¹ Cic. *Fam.* 5.20.2. See Treggiari (1969: 265); Fabre (1981: 222, 288–290).

²² Val. Max. 6.8.

²³ Macrobi. *Sat.* 1.11.16–45.

estate.”²⁴ Opting for death over riches makes Philotimus the epitome of a pious freedman, above and beyond any act of fidelity that he could have performed as a slave. Such *exempla* resonate with the negative stereotype of the wealthy *libertus*, whose defining characteristics are false pride and conspicuous consumption.²⁵

The standards promulgated in part by these exemplary tales and related rhetorical *topoi* determined the nature of the praise that ex-slaves might expect to receive from members of the elite. In Roman literature, admiration for individual freedmen often highlighted not only respect for patrons, but also adherence to generic social norms, including simplicity and moderation. Horace’s portrait of his freedman father in *Satires* 1.6 averts the stereotype of the rich ex-slave by emphasizing moral themes.²⁶ Likewise, in his consolation for Polybius, a member of the imperial household who was grieving the death of his brother, Seneca lauds the powerful freedman for not being a slave to his wealth – “despite acquiring money so easily, he never seeks a greater profit than to spurn it.”²⁷ Statius’ encomia of *liberti Augusti* draw on similar themes by celebrating personal virtues and, in the case of Claudius Etruscus’ father, appreciation for the simple life.²⁸ “Good” *liberti* embodied traits comparable to those of “good” slaves, but with the added requirement that they observe the limits of their freedom, particularly in the acquisition of material resources.

Basic rules of comportment also applied to *liberti* whose patrons had died or were otherwise out of the picture. The prominence of the “independent freedman” in the Roman economy has recently come under scrutiny, since ex-slaves would have benefitted more from collaboration with their patron’s network than from striking out on their own. Still, the popularity of testamentary manumission and low life expectancies in the Roman world meant that many (if not most) *liberti* would have lost their patron at some stage. Authority might pass to the deceased’s relatives, but these secondary ties are unlikely to have been as strong as the original one.²⁹ In the absence of immediate oversight by a former master, social norms became even more important, sometimes reaching

²⁴ Plin. *HN* 7.36.122; cf. the negative *exemplum* of Haterius’ slave, recounted by Appian (*BCiv.* 4.4.29).

²⁵ For the *topos* of the wealthy freedman, see Petron. *Sat.* e.g. 77.6; Hor. *Ep.* 4.6; additional examples are collected by Fabre (1981: 238–241).

²⁶ Hor. *Sat.* 1.6.71, 85–87. See below, pp. 86–91.

²⁷ Sen. *Ad Polybium* 2.3.

²⁸ Stat. *Silv.* 3.3.106–110, 147–148. See also Gibson (2015: 132–134).

²⁹ Mouritsen (2011a: 243).

the level of public concern. The *lex Fufia Caninia*, for instance, regulated manumission by testament not to reduce the size of the freed population but to ensure that only the most deserving slaves would be released into the civic body without a patron to guide them.³⁰

A Freedman's Guide to *Fama*

In funerary commemorations, freedmen were able to appropriate these behavioral norms to construct positive personae for themselves and each other. In a handful of surviving epitaphs, commemorators refer explicitly to such qualities by using words like *frugi* ("honest"), *simplex* ("artless"), *honestus* ("respectable"), and *bonus* ("of good character").³¹ Forms of *obsequens* ("compliant") appear only rarely in Latin sepulchral inscriptions, most often to describe wives, including freedwomen who married their patrons.³² A few ex-masters apply the term to *liberti*, and a freedwoman from Rome calls herself *obsequens* when setting up a monument for her patron.³³ *Fidelissimus* ("most faithful") was not among the most popular epithets and may have had special relevance to Christian circles; but patrons did apply the word to ex-slaves in burial inscriptions.³⁴ In turn, when commemorating former masters, freedmen could highlight the ideals of loyalty and gratitude by using adjectives like *optimus* ("best") or *indulgentissimus* ("most indulgent") to depict the deceased.³⁵

³⁰ Mouritsen (2011a: 51–52).

³¹ For *frugi*, see *CIL* 6.9629, 10246, 32311, 37641. *Simplex*: *CIL* 11.1563, 6551; 14.1597. *Honestus*: *CIL* 1.1822; 14.2605; 9.2385. *Bonus*: *CIL* 5.562; 6.21225; *AE* 1969, 121. Note also the overlap between freed and female virtues in cases where a freedwoman is defined as a spouse.

³² E.g. *CIL* 2.1399; 6.15927, 20116, 33087 (both spouses *obsequens*); 9.5910; 10.6104, 1699; *AE* 1974, 18, *AE* 1992, 809; *Inscrit. Aqu.* 3.3450. Epitaphs attesting "most obedient" wives who had married their patron include *CIL* 5.6072; 6.23848, 37965; 10.3426. On patron–*liberta* relationships in Roman funerary monuments, see Perry (2014: 106–114).

³³ *CIL* 6.9283 = *ILS* 7617 (late first century BCE to early first century CE). Patrons dedicating to "obedient" freedmen include *CIL* 6.25858, 27108, 27824; *AE* 1992, 355; *Inscrit. Aqu.* 1.479, 2.1331. For the application of *obsequens* to *alumni*, see *CIL* 2.4351; 8.22928; 11.420.

³⁴ On the Christian significance of *fidelis*, see Sigismund Nielsen (2001); for this epithet in Latin epigraphy more generally, see Harrod (1909: 28–29). Patrons who commemorate *liberti* in such terms include men and women attested in *CIL* 5.984; 6.9834, 13913, 14482, 16816, 17514, 21305, 25691; 10.5375; *AE* 1986, 88; cf. *CIL* 6.6191 (commissioned by a freedwoman who claims to have lived with her patron/husband "most faithfully"). See Joshel (1992: 57–58).

³⁵ For the phrase *patrono optimo* used by ex-slaves, see e.g. *CIL* 6.2880, 3553, 3580, 3613, 6192, 7442, 8100, 9679, 12037, 13838, 14011, 14030, 14853, 15030, 15172, 15178, 15302, 15694, 15715, 16031, 16162, 17018, 17535, 18021, 20021, 20288, 21397, 21992, 22481, 23819, 24303, 24454, 25542, 25778, 25785, 27570, 28196, 28543, 29198, 29474, 31774, 34401, 34954, 35795, 36322, 36553, 37556, 38375; *AE* 1980, 421, *AE* 1992, 1216, *AE* 1990, 96. For *indulgentissimus*, which could accompany *optimus*, see *CIL* 6.5483, 6191, 9177, 9673, 11307, 12954, 18072, 19239, 32296, 40680.

Although these cases are instructive, they are also exceptional; the vast majority of freed commemorators engaged prevailing norms by selecting elements like *bene merens*, terms for spouses and children, and professional titles. I will return to these patterns in due course. First, a small corpus of thirty-five epitaphs that contain the word *fama* (“fame,” “reputation,” “renown”) will help to illuminate from a qualitative perspective how people of different social backgrounds approached the concepts of honor, authority, personal virtue, and commemoration.³⁶ While *fama* could have negative connotations in Roman literature, epitaphs of elite men link the idea positively with lineage, *virtus*, and civic activity. Gendered expectations appear to have cut across status boundaries. Moreover, inscriptions in this corpus that refer to the *fama* of freedmen are notable for their combination of vocational skill with deference, moral rectitude, and social stability. Rather than reiterating criteria established by slave-owners, these freed commemorators transformed dominant virtues into a platform for the preservation of memory.

The word *fama* embraced a wide range of meanings.³⁷ A fragment from Ennius’ *Achilles* has been taken as evidence that *fama* originally carried a pejorative nuance, in contrast to *gloria*.³⁸ In that vein, Cicero criticizes *fama popularis* (“fame bestowed by the crowd”) for being a paltry imitation of true renown.³⁹ Such critiques of *fama* stemmed in part from the term’s association with popular discourse, which Roman aristocrats denigrated because of the perceived fickleness of the masses, but also courted for political reasons. *Fama* was therefore less a strictly negative concept than an ambiguous one. Although Cicero differentiated *fama* from securely aristocratic terms like *gloria*, he understood fully the importance of public opinion.⁴⁰ Moreover, in funerary inscriptions dating back to the second century BCE, *fama* almost always has a positive meaning, with or without qualification.⁴¹

³⁶ The corpus includes sepulchral inscriptions in published volumes for the Augustan *regiones* and Sardinia that contain the word *fama*: *CIL* 5.3996, 5930; 6.1288, 1527, 2160, 10021, 10230, 14211, 17056, 19175 ([*fama*] restored), 23137, 26926, 27140, 30129, 33903; 9.47, 4796; 10.1091, 1309, 4915, 5551; 11.1122a–b, 1517, 1616; 14.636, 1597, 2765, 3709 ([*fama*] restored); *AE* 1896, 91, *AE* 1924, 104, *AE* 1968, 164, *AE* 1968, 74, *AE* 1987, 196, *AE* 2008, 403. *CIL* 10.7565, 7566, 7575 are part of the same burial complex and count here as one epitaph. I excluded explicitly Christian epitaphs and honorific inscriptions, although a few ambiguities necessarily remain. Entries too fragmentary to be useful were also excluded.

³⁷ See especially Neubauer (1998); Néraudau (1993); Hardie (2012).

³⁸ Enn. *Achilles* 10 Vahlen; see Néraudau (1993: 31).

³⁹ Cic. *Tusc.* 3.2.4; cf. e.g. Sall. *Cat.* 7.6 (*bona fama*); Hardie (2012: 22–36).

⁴⁰ Hardie (2012: 241–244); cf. Néraudau (1993); Habinek (2000: 268–269).

⁴¹ *Fama* is used in a negative context in the verse epitaph of a boy named Telephus, whose parents were deceived by the “great renown of a deceitful mathematician” (*CIL* 6.27140 = *CLE* 1163).

Specific virtues and achievements associated with *fama* in the present corpus of inscriptions correlate roughly with status and gender, although it is impossible to draw broad conclusions from such a small number of texts. Predictably, the memoranda whose *fama* is praised in tandem with public priesthoods and offices (not including the **Augustales*), in addition to other achievements and qualities, were men of equestrian or senatorial rank.⁴² Five freeborn women and five *incertae* are praised for *fama* on the basis of such conventionally feminine traits as chastity and loyalty to their husbands.⁴³ By contrast, the epitaphs of male ex-slaves in this collection tend to relate *fama* to the deceased's occupational skill, as well as to domestic virtues. Of the eleven monuments that allude to both work and *fama*, six commemorate freedmen or probable freedmen; one commemorates slaves; two commemorate *ingenui*; and two *incerti*.⁴⁴ However, of the *ingenui*, one was probably the descendant of an imperial freedman and the other was a *sevir*, an office which suggests outsider status with respect to the decurional elite.⁴⁵ In most of these cases, claims to vocational skill and financial success are mediated by terms like *fides*, *honestas*, or *simplicitas* to balance the image of productivity with that of deference to social norms.⁴⁶ This balance would have been especially advantageous for memoranda whom members of elite Roman society perceived as social climbers, although the perceptions of one's peers would have been equally, if not more influential.

Close examination of specific examples will help to elucidate several themes. The epitaph of a P. Scipio, probably the invalid son of Africanus,

⁴² *CIL* 6.1288 = *ILLRP* 311; *CIL* 6.2160; *CIL* 9.47. *CIL* 6.33903 (second century CE) commemorates the poet Claudius Diadumenus, "who held all the Caesarian offices" and was likely the recent descendant of an imperial freedman. *CIL* 6.34001 = *CLE* 1814 = *ILS* 9022 (late second or early third century CE) commemorates T. Aelius Faustus Macarius, who was probably also the son of an imperial freedman; see Alföldy (2005: 48–49).

⁴³ *Ingenuae*: *CIL* 10.7565, 7566, 7575 (Pomptilla); 6.1527 (Turia), 10230 (Murdia); 10.1091, 5551. *Incertae*: 10.1309; 11.1517; 14.1597, 3709; *AE* 1968, 74.

⁴⁴ Freedmen and probable freedmen: *CIL* 5.5930; 6.26926; 9.4796; 10.4915; *AE* 1924, 104, *AE* 1987, 196. Slave: 6.10021. Freeborn: *CIL* 6.33903; 11.1616. *Incerti*: *AE* 1968, 74, *AE* 1968, 164 (in the latter, reference to work depends on interpretation of status as freed). See also *CIL* 6.27140, which refers to the *fama* of a mathematician but not of the deceased himself.

⁴⁵ See above, n. 42, on *CIL* 6.33903 (Claudius Diadumenus). *CIL* 11.1616 (Florentia, second half of the first century CE) attests a freeborn *sevir* named Q. Vibius Maximus Smintius. On freeborn **Augustales*, see Laird (2015: 6), following Abramenko (1993); Mouritsen (2006) stresses local diversity and points out that only two freeborn *sevir*i are attested at Florentia, in *CIL* 11.1616 and *AE* 1930, 119. Tran (2013: 191–192) further notes that *CIL* 11.1616 is unique for its allusions to manufacturing and *labor* in the same inscription.

⁴⁶ This phenomenon occurs to varying degrees in *CIL* 5.5930; 6.10021, 26926, 33903; 9.4796; 10.4915; *AE* 1968, 74, *AE* 1968, 164, *AE* 1987, 196.

stands out for its inclusion of the word *fama* in a series of personal virtues.⁴⁷ Although the Scipionic *elogia* were located inside the family tomb, they may contain highlights from funerary orations, and in that respect, it has been argued, they would have performed a similar function as did *tituli* labeling ancestral masks in the atria of elite houses. The first line of this epitaph was apparently added later, perhaps by Scipio Aemilianus to enhance the standing of his adoptive father:⁴⁸

Quei apice(m) insigne(m) Dial[is fl]aminis gesistei | mors perfec[it] tua
ut essent omnia | brevia honos fama virtusque | gloria atque ingenium
quibus sei | in longa licuisset tibe utier vita | facile facteis superases gloriam |
maiorum.

For you who wore the distinctive cap of the *flamen Dialis*, your death caused everything to be short – honor, fame, virtue, glory, and character; and if you had been allowed to enjoy these things over the course of a long life, you easily would have surpassed by your deeds the glory of your ancestors ...

Rather than activate the contrast between *fama* and *gloria* attested by Ennius' *Achilles*, the *elogium* associates Scipio's reputation with other noble qualities. It cites *fama* in the same breath as *honos*, *virtus*, *gloria*, and *ingenium*. Despite having failed to achieve the consulship – perhaps even because of this failure – the deceased is praised for his *fama*, aristocratic virtues, and, ultimately, a public priesthood.⁴⁹

The other inscriptions in this corpus that celebrate the *fama* of elite men date from the imperial period, but some basic concepts persist. One epitaph commemorates an *eques* at Rome named M. Ulpius Maximus, “whose *fama* is known for all time” (*cuius fama in eterna nota est*).⁵⁰ Maximus' *fama* appears in conjunction with his role as a priest of the Lupercal, while his happy marriage is also praised.⁵¹ The second inscription, from Brundisium, resembles an epitaph (hence its inclusion here) but cites a decree passed in honor of the deceased, L. Cassius Flavianus.⁵² In the decree, Flavianus is commended not only for eloquence and *industria*, but also because he “achieved *fama*” with the qualities of an outstanding and most remarkable

⁴⁷ *CIL* 6.1288 = *CIL* 1¹.10 = *ILLRP* 311 = *CLE* 8 = *ILS* 4. Flower (1996: 167–168); for alternative readings, see Moir (1986, 1988); Tatum (1988).

⁴⁸ Flower (1996: 166–184). I cite here the first five lines.

⁴⁹ Appeals to noble lineage also appear in inscriptions of the Christian elite, e.g. *CIL* 5.6464 (St. Ennodius); 6.41421, 32038.

⁵⁰ *CIL* 6.2160 = *ILS* 4947 = Rüpke (2008: no. 3321).

⁵¹ See Ehmig (2012: 14–15) on the rarity of the phrase applied to Maximus' marriage (*sine ulla querella*, or “without any quarrel”) in aristocratic commemorations.

⁵² *CIL* 9.47 = Sherk (1970: 25, no. 13); see Silvestrini (2003: 193–196) for dating and analysis.

citizen. Three generations of descent appear in Flavianus' nomenclature. Advertising this extended lineage may counteract the family's origins in the slave household of the Cassii Longini, although the theory cannot be confirmed.⁵³ Most importantly, for my purposes, both inscriptions call upon aristocratic ideals to legitimate the recipient's civic renown.

By contrast, elite women were expected to achieve lasting fame by cultivating traits like chastity or by supporting their husbands' careers. The author of the so-called *Laudatio Turiae* takes comfort in his wife's *fama*, which emanates from stereotypically feminine virtues, but also from her interventions on his behalf during the proscriptions of the Second Triumvirate.⁵⁴ In another frequently cited inscription, which records a eulogy for Murdia delivered by her son, the generic nature of female virtue justifies the claim that "it would be enough for all [women] to have done the same deeds worthy of a good reputation."⁵⁵ Under this umbrella fall Murdia's *modestia*, *probitas* ("integrity"), *pudicitia* ("sense of shame"), and *diligentia*, as well as *lanificium* ("wool-working"), *fides*, and *obsequium*. Although none of the women in the present corpus are identified explicitly as freed slaves, *incertae* are held to similarly gendered standards. One remarkable epitaph from second- or third-century Rome lauds an actress for both matronly virtues and her prowess on the stage.⁵⁶

An essential quality underlying the commemoration of women's *fama* was that of *pietas*, which in this context entails the fulfillment of mutual obligations toward family members. A funerary stele from Campania makes the connection explicit:⁵⁷

Calpurniae L(uci) f(iliae) | Severae femina(e) | rarissimae qu(a)e | vixit ann(is)
XXIII | m(ensibus) IIII Viria Prima | mater infelici(s)ima qu(a)e supra e(a)m |
vibit fecit filiae | incomparabili | cuius fama pietas | vibit in aeternum.

To Calpurnia Severa, daughter of Lucius, a most remarkable woman who lived 23 years and 4 months. Viria Prima, her most unfortunate mother, who survived her, made this for her incomparable daughter, whose *pietas* lives forever in her *fama*.

⁵³ Silvestrini (2003: 194–195).

⁵⁴ *CIL* 6.1527, 31670, 37053 = *ILS* 8393; Wistrand (1976); Horsfall (1983); Osgood (2014). On gender norms and reversals in this text, see Hemelrijk (2004). Cf. *CIL* 10.7565, 7566, 7575 (Pomptilla).

⁵⁵ *CIL* 6.10230 = *ILS* 8394 (late first century BCE); Lindsay (2004).

⁵⁶ *AE* 1968, 74. See Starks (2008). Her profession suggests a low-status background but is not sufficient to categorize her as either a definite or probable *liberta*.

⁵⁷ *CIL* 10.1091 = MANN Inv. 3700 (Nuceria, second century CE).

In the last two lines, *fama* could be an ablative or a second subject of *vibit*; my translation reflects the former option. According to this reading, the epitaph highlights *fama*'s role as a vehicle for individual memory. At the same time, the word's placement next to *pietas* strengthens the relationship between these two ideas.

On the whole, these epitaphs suggest that women's *fama* was anchored in the household, even when piety toward husbands and children required entering the political sphere, or when work played a role. However, Roman men of various backgrounds also bolstered their *fama* by conducting themselves appropriately in domestic settings. For members of the late republican elite, the *Commentariolum Petitionis* recommends cultivating the affection of friends, relatives, freedmen, and slaves, "because nearly all the conversation that creates one's public reputation (*forensis fama*) originates from sources in the household."⁵⁸ Such interplay between public and private personae is born out in inscriptions that associate the *fama* of male slaves, *liberti*, and *ingenui* with marital concord and familial duties.⁵⁹

A number of the ex-slaves in the present corpus also derived *fama* from economic activity. The tombstones of these freed professionals integrate occupational skill with patronage, kinship, and normative virtues to provide a foundation for perpetuating the memory of the deceased. One clear example of the link between *fama* and patronage appears in a verse epitaph commissioned by Calpurnia Anthis for her son, Ikadium:⁶⁰

Calpurnia Anthis fecit | dextera fama mihi fuit et fortuna patrona |
magnifici coniunx Caesaris illa dei | qua bene tutus eram caris nec vilis
amicis | quis etiam mecum plurima cura fuit | Anthis causa meae vitae quae
cara sepulcro | condidit ossa suo nominor Ikadium.

Calpurnia Anthis made this. I was blessed in my *fama*, fortune, and patroness. She was the wife of Caesar, the eminent divinity, and through her I was kept safe from cares; nor was I of little value to my friends, who cared for me greatly. Anthis was the author of my life; she buried my dear bones in her own tomb. I am called Ikadium.

The text has a *terminus post quem* of 42 BCE, the year of Caesar's deification. The second line represents Ikadium's favorable reputation and fortune,

⁵⁸ *Comm. Pet.* 17, cf. 49.

⁵⁹ Freedmen: *AE* 1924, 104; *CIL* 6.23137. *Incerti*: *CIL* 11.1122a–b. *Ingenui*: *AE* 2008, 403; *CIL* 6.2160; 5.3996. Although much of the debate about the nature of the Roman family lies outside the immediate scope of this study, see especially Saller and Shaw (1984); Bradley (1991); Rawson (1966, 1986, 1991, 2011); Saller (1994); Rawson and Weaver (1997); Dixon (1992, 2011); George (2005); Dasen and Späth (2010).

⁶⁰ *CIL* 6.14211 = *CLE* 964 (*perit*); see Boyancé (1956).

together with his aristocratic *patrona*.⁶¹ For slaves and freedmen, belonging to a household like that of the Iulii carried a substantial amount of prestige, and Ikadium's *fama* seems inseparable from the fact that his former mistress was Calpurnia, wife of the deified Caesar.⁶² The ventriloquizing epitaph attributes a posture of deference and thankfulness to the deceased in order to serve the larger purpose of conveying his name to posterity.

At the same time, these verses ascribe meaning to Ikadium's parentage and friendships, two aspects of his biography that extend beyond the patron–freedman dyad. Anthi is keen to represent herself as the “author” (*causa*) of her son's life, in addition to being the commemorator of his death. While the epitaph does not mention Ikadium's occupation, it unites *fama* with *fortuna*, which hints at financial success of some kind. The choice of the phrase *nec vilis* to describe the deceased's value to his friends also employs language with economic undertones to instantiate the concept of *amicitia*.⁶³ These subtle allusions to Ikadium's worldly achievements help to shape his commemorative persona, which relies not only on the status and approval of an elite patron, but also on family and friendship.

The verse inscription of Suetrius Hermes complements that of Ikadium, this time dedicated by a wife to her husband, rather than by a mother to her son:⁶⁴

Suetrius Hermes hic situs est, cui Tertia coniunx | aram constituit
digno meritoque marito, | cum quo concordem vitam multosque per annos |
vixit et tenero casu(s) solata marito est, | de cuius fama multi cum laude
locuntur, | quod fuerit cultor domini rerumque et amator. | Tu qui -----

Here lies Suetrius Hermes, for whom his wife, Tertia, set up this altar – a worthy and deserving husband, with whom she lived a harmonious life for many years. Her misfortune she assuaged by a tender husband, about whose reputation many speak with praise, since he was the keeper and lover of his master's affairs. You, who ...

⁶¹ Cf. *CIL* 6.34175.

⁶² Calpurnia's marriage to Caesar in 59 BCE preceded his departure for Gaul by less than a year, and while he was away she managed the household. She was said to be involved in his political career, attempting to prevent him from going to the Senate on the Ides and delivering his will and other papers to Antony after his death. For the will, see Plut. *Ant.* 15; App. *BCiv.* 2.125. Events on the Ides: Suet. *Iul.* 81.3; App. *BCiv.* 2.115; Dio Cass. 44.17; Plut. *Caes.* 63. Her domestic staff would have been involved in the tumult, as is illustrated by the story of Calpurnia's rushing out of the house in grief accompanied by a throng of women and slaves (*FGrHist.* 90 F 130.26).

⁶³ On friendship and economic networks in the late republic, see Verboven (2002).

⁶⁴ *CIL* 6.26926 = *CLE* 461 (mid-first to second century CE?); Bücheler's text. I translate *domini rerumque* as hendiadys for “his master's affairs.” I see no compelling reason to interpret *dominus* as “Lord,” in the Christian sense, but cf. Meyer (1835; n. 1325).

These lines highlight not only Hermes' bond to his spouse but also his praiseworthy reputation, which derives from loyal service to his "master," presumably in an administrative or supervisory capacity.⁶⁵ Using *dominus* to identify the deceased's former owner emphasizes the imbalance between the two men.⁶⁶ Yet Hermes' attentiveness to his patron's affairs also constitutes an essential component of his persona in death. His *fama* springs not from civic achievements but from the performance of his obligations.

These *liberti* took an approach to *fama* that drew on the unique significance of labor and service to their social order. Behavioral ideals were imposed on ex-slaves by patrons and by society at large. One inscription in this corpus, it should be noted, was commissioned by a patron of unknown status for himself, his wife, and his freedman, whose skill and honest life are commended alongside his *fama*.⁶⁷ This epitaph applies the patron's conception of virtue to the commemorated former slave. However, the remaining epitaphs that cite an ex-slave's work and *fama* were commissioned by the commemorand, other freedmen, or a party of unknown status. This likely reflects broader trends in Roman funerary culture, but it also implies that freed slaves made epigraphic selections that adapted prevailing norms to suit their rhetorical needs.⁶⁸ By combining deference, gratitude, and other servile virtues with evidence of occupational skill, these ex-slaves counteracted the stereotype of the "bad" *libertus* while celebrating their own or a loved one's achievements.

Traders and artisans may have been especially prone to criticism on the grounds of supposed duplicity.⁶⁹ In this environment, men like L. Nerusius Mithres, a goatskin dealer in the second century CE, found it beneficial to underscore ethical practices alongside financial success.⁷⁰ Mithres' acrostic inscription celebrates his "rare *fides*," *simplicitas* in business, consistency

⁶⁵ On the use of *amator domini* for slaves and freedmen, cf. the phrase *amans domini* in a late republican epitaph from Capua (CIL 10.4167 = CIL 1².1593 = ILS 8411 = ILLRP 933); *amantissimus domini* in a second-century CE epitaph from Rome (CIL 6.37269); and *eum semper dominus probavit* ("his master always approved of him") in a first-century epitaph from the capital (CIL 6.38474). Other examples and uses are discussed by Chioffi (2016).

⁶⁶ One might argue that *dominus* would have been more applicable than *patronus* if this had been a deathbed manumission. Deathbed manumissions are described by Plin. *Ep.* 8.16; Petron. *Sat.* 65.10; and Mart. *Ep.* 1.101. They seem to have been most common among slaves who died young, on which pattern see Mouritsen (2011a: 187). The statement that Hermes and Tertia lived together "for many years" therefore militates against such a reading.

⁶⁷ CIL 5.5930 (Mediolanum, second century CE).

⁶⁸ See Joshel (1992: 51, table 2.5) for comparison.

⁶⁹ The *locus classicus* for this idea is Cic. *Off.* 1.150; see Joshel (1992: 66); cf. Bond (2016: 147–148).

⁷⁰ CIL 9.4796 = CLE 437 = ILS 7542 (Maglianum). I classify L. Nerusius Mithres as a "probable freedman" due to his *cognomen*, although the epitaph does not contain a clear indication of status.

in paying taxes, fairness, and courtesy toward friends. The epitaph claims that his role as an “*exemplum* of praise” will be sustained by future generations, thanks to the monument that he commissioned for himself and his household. At Ostia, P. Aufidius Epictetus – probably the freed merchant attested in dedications to his patron and that man’s son – was lauded by his wife for outstanding *fama*.⁷¹ Although his trade is not stated explicitly in this epitaph, viewers familiar with Epictetus’ standing in the community may have found the economic basis for his renown balanced by a description of his character as *probatas* (“agreeable”), *simplex*, *bonus*, *beatus* (“happy”), and *felix* (“lucky”). If the attribution is correct, claims to affability and cheer in a domestic context would have filled out the public persona attested elsewhere.

Another prominent businessman from Ostia, M. Quintilius, commissioned a *titulus* for his tomb in the latter half of the third century CE. Although the burial marker dates later than most of the epitaphs considered in this study, the inscription is worthy of note:⁷²

[D(is) M(anibus)] | M(arcus) Quintilius [--- sevir Au]gust(alis) | idem q(uin)q(uennalis) fecit s[ibi] corp(or)um lenunc(ulariorum) t[ra]iect(us) | Luculli et stu[pp]atorum q(uin)q(uennalis)] perpetu(us) | [i]s talia passus vita[m] trah[en]s qui semper | [a]micos mente bona [--- sple]ndida fama per mare | [pe]r fluvium qua ping[ui]s [---]ret bis compilatus | [---] gladium fugi simplex | [--- b]ona semper sine fraude.

To the divine shades. M. Quintilius [? sevir Au]gustalis and *quinquennalis* made this for himself, *quinquennalis perpetuus* of the college of ferrymen and caulk-makers at Ostia. Having experienced such things during his life, a man who always [?] friends with good intentions ... brilliant *fama* through the sea, through the river [Tiber], where rich [?], twice plundered I fled the sword, artless; good [?] always without trickery.

Quintilius’ epitaph moves from a list of offices to a more personalized message, which includes praise of his “brilliant *fama*” at sea and on the Tibur, places where his vocational abilities were put to the test. Again, the deceased’s economic success is qualified by the virtue of *simplicitas*, together with the phrase *sine fraude*. While the inscription is fragmentary, these elements integrate Roman social norms with a celebration of Quintilius’ effectiveness in his profession.

⁷¹ CIL 14.636 (Ostia, second century CE) = Louvre Inv. MA 2166.

⁷² AE 1987, 196; see Licordari (1987: no. 4), with photos. Membership in the *seviri Augustales* at Ostia allows for the classification of Quintilius as a probable freedman, but no status indication or other relevant evidence is provided by this fragmentary text. On the preponderance of freed **Augustales* at Ostia, see Abramenko (1993: 227–233).

This limited corpus suggests in a preliminary way that ex-slaves could derive positive *fama* from occupational skill, on the one hand, and the performance of social norms, on the other. Such norms included loyal service, gratitude toward a patron, honesty in financial affairs, and domestic virtues. However, some freedmen's *fama* is depicted only in generic terms or as stemming entirely from familial piety, without reference to patronage or professional activity. In a late republican epitaph, for example, C. Numitorius Asclepiades and his wife Mummia Zosima, freedwoman of Lucius, are commemorated jointly for having been "a likeminded pair, with an upstanding reputation and honorable death" (*famaque bona exsistūq(ue) honest(o)*).⁷³ Because the number of epitaphs that contain the word *fama* is so small, and the subgroups of freedmen represented within it are so specific, insights drawn from this material alone cannot be generalized. Rather, epitaphs that cite *fama* provide glimpses into how considerations like status, work, kinship, and behavioral standards might intersect to shape the persona of an individual *libertus*, whether through self-commemoration or commemoration by others.

Assessing ex-slaves' approach to *fama* in the context of larger scale studies modifies the significance of certain observations while expanding that of others. In particular, the importance of marriage and family to freedmen's commemorative practices deserves further discussion. It has been forcefully argued that freed slaves' epigraphic habit was fueled primarily by a desire to commemorate kin after manumission, which endowed the family unit with greater stability than could be attained in captivity.⁷⁴ Freedom eased the disruptive forces of sale and physical abuse, despite the fact that relatives who remained in servitude would still have been vulnerable.⁷⁵ Because the majority of epitaphs commissioned by *liberti* were housed inside group tombs – and therefore spoke mainly to a private, rather than to a public audience – it is reasonable to suppose that factors related to the family motivated freed slaves' epigraphic production more than did competitive display, at least in quantitative terms.

At the same time, emphasizing one's marital bond or position at the head of a household could contribute powerfully to one's public persona, especially for founders of a new family line. Among freed citizens, a stable and productive marriage arguably provided one indicator of social

⁷³ *CIL* 1².1347 = *CIL* 6.23137 = *CLE* 15 = *ILS* 8400 (first century BCE). Cf. *CIL* 6.10021.

⁷⁴ Mouritsen (2005; 2011a: 286; 2011b). On family structure among freedmen and other low-status groups at Rome, see especially Rawson (1966); Flory (1978).

⁷⁵ Kleijwegt (2012); Petron. *Sat.* 57.6.

integration and legitimacy.⁷⁶ The provision that Junian Latins could petition for citizenship if they married and had a child who survived its first year speaks to Augustus' legislative emphasis on social order and procreation.⁷⁷ Likewise, the ideological model of the virtuous matron helped to govern the entry of *libertae* into free society.⁷⁸ Against this backdrop, ex-slaves' commemorations of deceased family members have been interpreted as an advertisement of legal status, social inclusion, and even moral conservatism.⁷⁹ The language and imagery that some *liberti* used to depict their marital unions resonate with the broader Roman discourse about spousal duty and affection.⁸⁰ From this point of view, ties between spouses had a public or civic dimension, in addition to their personal meaning.

Freedmen's interest in advertising their capacity to marry and become heads of household cannot explain the statistical frequency of their epigraphic output, nor was claiming integration their only objective. As noted in the [previous chapter](#), attempts to link freed culture universally to pride or shame about legal status have been shown to be unnecessarily reductive. However, constructing a tomb in which one's close relations and descendants would be buried constituted in many instances both an assertion of free status and a celebration of stability in present and future generations; quantitative issues aside, a family tomb marked by a *titulus* could easily address both public and private concerns. While emphasis varied from one tomb to another, attestations of freedom, wealth, lineage, and the security of kinship networks after manumission would not necessarily have been at odds with each other. Moreover, worshippers who tended to gravesites and carried out rites of remembrance performed their own belonging to lines of descent and to the wider community, even as they fulfilled personal or familial needs.

In addition to commemorating their families, *liberti* integrated representations of work alongside other elements. Joshel's study of occupational titles in inscriptions from Rome has shown that slaves and

⁷⁶ Leppin (1996: 80); Zanker (1975: 285); Kleiner (1977: 18, 188); Shaw (1991: 87–88); George (2005); Petersen (2006: 184–226). George (2005: 43) writes e.g.: “Part of the appeal of family imagery was therefore the moral validation it carried, and the public repudiation of the servile stereotype and all its pejorative associations that lingered in the popular perception of freedmen.”

⁷⁷ See e.g. Koops (2014: 123); Mouritsen (2011a: 85–86). This was the mechanism used by L. Venidius Ennychus (*Tabulae Herculenses* 5, 84) and would likely have been the most accessible form of promotion for the majority of Junian Latins.

⁷⁸ Perry (2014: 148–154).

⁷⁹ Fabre (1981: 215); Wrede (1981: 107); Weaver (1991); Shaw (1991: 87); George (2006); cf. Mouritsen (2011a: 287).

⁸⁰ George (2006: 21); on Roman ideals of marriage, see Dixon (1992: 67–71); Treggiari (1991: 229–261).

freedmen were more likely to appear with a job title than were *ingenui*.⁸¹ Within that sample, vocational titles are skewed slightly toward the enslaved, and thorough analysis of *columbarium* inscriptions has revealed an even greater discrepancy – whether because job titles held special significance for slaves in this setting or because plaques with a single slave name left empty space to be filled.⁸² Even if the tendency to record job titles declined somewhat after manumission, Joshel’s analysis demonstrates that many *liberti* benefitted from commemorating professional and economic achievements. For some ex-slaves, such as domestic personnel and urban artisans who continued to work for their patron, relationships formed and maintained through labor would have contributed to their personae. In addition, citing the deceased’s job in an epitaph “shifts attention from birth and honor to productive activities and relations,” a process which transformed dominant standards into legitimate grounds for commemoration.⁸³

The prestige derived from occupational skill could be an end in itself or could interact with other themes, such as kinship and patronage.⁸⁴ This helps to contextualize my analysis of epitaphs that relate ex-slaves’ *fama* to loyalty, service, conjugal harmony, and other domestic qualities, together with industry and professional success. As Joshel observes in her discussion of wealthy artisans and traders, “the family tomb, often including freed slaves ... is a concrete record of the freedman’s establishment of a socially acknowledged family whose descendants, unlike the freedman himself, belonged to the legitimate social order by birth.”⁸⁵ Again, for all its private significance, the freed household might support ex-slaves’ claims to inclusion in the community. *Liberti* who integrate professional titles with evidence of stable families therefore balance the depiction of productivity against the citation of normative virtues.

As I have argued with respect to *fama*, occupational skill might be qualified by traits like honesty, simplicity, frugality, even poverty. The magnificent tomb of Eurysaces at once conveys the deceased’s integrity in business and celebrates his massive fortune. In Latin epigraphy more

⁸¹ Joshel (1992: 46–49). On the problem of comparing the value of work among freedmen to that among *ingenui*, who are underrepresented in the epigraphic record, see Mouritsen (2011a: 290, n. 37); cf. also Mayer (2012: 110–120); Tran (2013: 188–252). However, the point stands that freedmen integrated work into their commemorative personae with greater frequency than did *ingenui*, even when individuals of uncertain status are taken into account.

⁸² Borbonus (2014: 126–128); Joshel (1992: 49–56, 100–106); cf. Mouritsen (2011b: 133).

⁸³ Joshel (1992: 56–61), quotation from p. 60.

⁸⁴ George (2006) examines changing emphases over time.

⁸⁵ Joshel (1992: 84).

generally, tradesmen who receive epithets like *honestus*, *bonus*, *frugi*, and *fidelis* are often, though not always, freedmen or probable freedmen.⁸⁶ Proclaiming one's meager circumstances or advancement from poverty might also counteract prevailing views about those who gleaned wealth from particular trades. A dedication to Fortuna in honor of T. Caesius Primus, a grain merchant at Praeneste, asserts that "his *fama* and *fides* were steadfast, as was his sense of shame, which prevails over wealth" (*cui constat fama fidesque et, qui divitias vincit, pudor*).⁸⁷ Ex-slaves who present themselves in this fashion undoubtedly deployed a set of ideas that circulated widely in Roman culture, and their statements resonate with the interests of freeborn tradesmen, among others.⁸⁸ Yet by virtue of their vibrant epigraphic culture, freed slaves applied these concepts to the commemorative sphere in a particularly noteworthy way. That is to say that even if *liberti* shared certain strategies with other groups in the middle and lower strata of society, their application of those strategies to the production of epigraphic monuments placed them in a strong position to participate in and ultimately to influence the commemorative politics of imperial Italy.

Epitaphs that document the patron–freedman relationship address problems unique to the freed population, most notably the requirement of *fides* and *obsequium* on the part of former slaves toward former masters. Providing space in a family tomb for one's freedmen, freedwomen, and their descendants (*libertis libertabusque posterisque eorum*) was common practice under the principate. Less often, though not exceptionally, ex-slaves commemorated patrons by name and vice versa.⁸⁹ The light in which both parties tend to cast these relationships emphasizes duty and gratitude, more than affective emotions. As a survey of epithets in Latin sepulchral inscriptions has revealed, patrons are most commonly described as "well deserving" (*bene merens*) or "best" (*optimus*), whereas choices for freedmen lean toward *bene merens*, along with *carissimus* ("dearest"), *pientissimus*,

⁸⁶ In addition to the examples discussed with regard to *fama*, see the freedmen and probable freedmen commemorated in *CIL* 6.32311 (*pudentis hominis frugi cum magna fide*, also above n. 31), 9545 = I².1212 = *ILS* 7602, 6308 (*honeste vixit*), 9663a (*homo super omnes fidelissimus*, Christian); 5.562 (*homo bonus*, n. 31); 9.2128 (*feci iniuriam nulli*); *AE* 2010, 394 (*sodali bono humanae vitae*); *AE* 1991, 122a (*fide et amicitia sanctissimus*); *CIL* 11.5836 (*nobiliore fide*); *CIL* 12.4492 (*frugi*); *AE* 1982, 173a-b (*recte omnia velim sint nobis*), *AE* 1969, 121 (*fide cum magna vixit*, n. 31). Freeborn professionals are depicted similarly in *CIL* 6.37806 (*frugi, castus, amabilis omnibus*); *CIL* 13.1906 (*sapientissimus et fidelissimus*); and perhaps 8.7156 (*fides* [sic] *in me mira fuit*). See Tran (2013: 188–252).

⁸⁷ *CIL* 14.2852 = *ILS* 3696 = *CLE* 249 (136 CE).

⁸⁸ See e.g. Tran (2006b: 97–102; 2013: 243–251).

⁸⁹ Petersen (2006: 78); Carroll (2011: 133–141).

and *optimus*.⁹⁰ These trends may reflect at a macro level the obligatory nature of the patron–freedman bond, a pattern that agrees with less generic, though in some ways more informative adjectives like *fidelissimus* and *indulgentissimus*.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that freedmen's prominence in Roman funerary culture relied not only on an impetus to commemorate but also on responsibilities that patrons allotted to freed dependents in the areas of death and burial.⁹¹ Manumitted slaves were a familiar presence in Roman funerary processions.⁹² Some *liberti* commissioned tombs for their ex-master because they had become heirs to the estate, whereas others paid with their own money to complete this duty.⁹³ Several extant wills stipulate that the testator's freedmen undertake the construction of a monument or watch over the site.⁹⁴ And Trimalchio promises to have a freedman stationed at his tomb to prevent people from using it as a latrine.⁹⁵ On the one hand, commemorating a patron furnished *liberti* with opportunities to inscribe their own names in stone and, in select cases, to attach themselves to a prominent household or even to establish ancestry.⁹⁶ At the same time, this class of monument instantiates the fulfillment of legal and social obligations over which freedmen ultimately had little say.

In epigraphic monuments commissioned for themselves and others, many *liberti* made claims to personal achievement and kinship, as well as to social integration. Some chose to balance economic success with the representation of dominant behavioral standards in order to establish a positive persona in the common memory. In other cases, freedmen were bound by law and convention to comport themselves as grateful recipients of their ex-masters' favor. Nevertheless, even compulsory acts of commemoration could serve a strategic purpose, for example by creating a record of legal inheritance or by associating the commemorator with an elite *domus*. Deriving prestige from loyal service to a patron did not preclude the upholding of work and family as legitimate sources of meaning. Close analysis of epitaphs that promote the *fama* of the deceased suggests that these elements could be placed into dialogue with each other.

⁹⁰ Sigismund Nielsen (1997: 179–185).

⁹¹ Although the most frequently attested relationships in funerary commemorations belonged to immediate family, see Saller and Shaw (1984: 139) on the preponderance of servile dependents over friends in regions with high concentrations of slaves and freedmen.

⁹² See e.g. Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 4.24.6; Pers. *Sat.* 3.105–106.

⁹³ Carroll (2011: 137–138).

⁹⁴ Champlin (1991: 135).

⁹⁵ Petron. *Sat.* 71.8.

⁹⁶ Petersen (2006: 218); D'Ambra (1995).

Immortality under a *Princeps*

Freed slaves' approach to commemoration took on new significance under the principate, not simply because the epigraphic habit intensified, but because the strategies with which aristocratic men pursued glory changed. Traditional avenues to public acclaim lay in military prowess and political office, attended of course by moral virtue. These were not the only methods for establishing one's name for posterity, but they were central to elite culture at Rome. Earning lasting renown and commemorating civic careers under an autocrat therefore required fundamental adjustments, particularly in the capital city. Although conventional titles, institutions, and ideals persisted, elite competition for such accolades ultimately depended on the whim of the *princeps*; under these conditions, striving for glory became a dangerous proposition.⁹⁷

To understand the impact of these developments, it is worth turning back to Veyne's ideas about the rise of an "aristocracy of service." For Veyne, the shift in elite power dynamics under the empire helped to produce a new era in which rivalry among ruling families, headed by a *paterfamilias*, gave way to a system in which aristocrats served the state and *princeps* in polite harmony with one another. With the ebbing of traditional structures of competitive honor and authority, Veyne argued, the elite reoriented its sexual mores toward conjugal love, self-control, and other inwardly focused virtues that transformed notions of self, community, and household.⁹⁸ This thesis may overstate the novelty of the nuclear family and downplay the influence of Christianity, which has been shown to have transformed Greco-Roman sexuality in fundamental respects.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, Veyne's understanding of monarchy's implications for the elite remains useful, because it emphasizes the idea that behaviors adapted to shifting political conditions. In the civic sphere, the emperor's public acts were tied to his personal qualities through the ideology of *beneficia*; legal decisions, grants of citizenship, and other normal state functions were seen as benefits bestowed by the monarch in the context of his relationship with individual subjects.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ A detailed account of the emperor's control over the senatorial *ordo* and offices may be found in Millar (1992: 290–313); cf. with respect to the ideology of honor, Lendon (1997: 176–201). On the equestrian career path, see e.g. Saller (1980); Rowe (2002: 74–75).

⁹⁸ Veyne (1978: 37); Foucault (1986); see also Brown (1988); Bartsch (2006).

⁹⁹ Harper (2013). On the nuclear family, see especially Saller and Shaw (1984).

¹⁰⁰ Veyne (1990: 347).

The self-representation of aristocrats in commemorative monuments under the principate reflects basic structural changes.¹⁰¹ At the same time as Augustus consolidated authority by accumulating magistracies and harnessing state institutions, the imperial household established a monopoly over traditional modes of display. These included such forms of elite competition as the triumph, manubial temples, and honorific statues in civic space. Famously, the last triumph awarded to a general outside the emperor's inner circle was that of L. Cornelius Balbus (19 BCE), whose name pointedly concludes the *Fasti Triumphales*. From that point forward, the emperor decided which of his generals would receive the *ornamenta triumphalia* ("triumphal insignia") and attendant honors. In particular, the placement of triumphal statues in the Forum of Augustus and later in the Forum of Trajan instantiated the monarch's power over the distribution of political honor.

This did not prevent members of the elite from commemorating offices and other accomplishments in alternative settings, including private houses and municipalities outside of Rome.¹⁰² Nevertheless, it was difficult to ignore the aristocracy's reliance on imperial favor. During the republic, inscriptions recording the *cursus honorum* had been restricted to senators honored *post mortem*. Under the principate, this form of commemoration expanded not only to senators who were still living but to other public officials, including equestrian functionaries, imperial freedmen, and decurions. This latter development stemmed in part from the emperor's prerogative to make appointments and to recommend candidates for high office.¹⁰³ By comparison to the republican system, there was now a much narrower margin of difference between a senatorial *cursus* and one based on appointments in the equestrian civil service or the *familia Caesaris*.¹⁰⁴

In such a climate, adopting a position of deference toward the *princeps* put senators at risk of appearing servile but also opened a potential route to glory. Most notably, Tacitus acknowledges the utility of deferential behavior in a biographical work about his father-in-law, Cn. Julius Agricola, who governed Britain between 77 and 84 CE. Although Agricola's connection to Tacitus certainly enhanced the memory of his achievements, his career was worthy of distinction in its own right.¹⁰⁵ In a programmatic and

¹⁰¹ For the following, see Eck (1984, 1996, 2009, 2010a, 2010b).

¹⁰² Eck (2010b), building on earlier work.

¹⁰³ Eck (1984 = 2010a: 1–43; 2009).

¹⁰⁴ Eck (2009: 91 = 2010a: 383–399).

¹⁰⁵ Braund (1996: 147–196); Syme (1958: 19ff.); *FRB*, pp. 73–81. Increased focus on the work of Agricola's predecessors has been advanced by several historical studies, including Birley (1953); Hanson (1987); Shotter (2000).

heavily cited passage, Tacitus elevates the general's *obsequium* and *modestia* alongside his *industria* and *vigor*.¹⁰⁶

Sciant, quibus moris est illicita mirari, posse etiam sub malis principibus magnos viros esse, obsequiumque ac modestiam, si industria ac vigor adsint, eo laudis excedere, quo plerique per abrupta, sed in nullum rei publicae usum ambitiosa morte inclinarunt.

Let it be known by those who are wont to admire rebellious deeds, that it is possible for there to be great men even under bad emperors. Obedience and humility, if combined with diligence and activity, may reach a level of praise that most men attain after a precipitous career, but they have become famous by means of an ostentatious death, of no use to the state.

Whereas moderation could entail self-mastery and restraint in the execution of authority over others, Agricola practices a form of modesty that embraces a certain amount of submission, albeit in the sense of taking a moderate stance, rather than groveling in a venal fashion.¹⁰⁷ By portraying this approach as a legitimate path to renown, Tacitus defends his own career, as well as that of Agricola.¹⁰⁸

One compelling interpretation of this text has emphasized its status as a monument through which Tacitus seeks to resolve the crisis of representation sparked by the rise of autocracy.¹⁰⁹ This crisis entailed a blurring of boundaries between aristocrats and slaves, because “if men of the elite cannot talk about and celebrate each other’s ‘deeds and ways,’ then in a way they cease to be an elite.”¹¹⁰ Standing in for Agricola’s triumph and eulogy, both of which Domitian obstructed, the work restores a connection between honorable deeds and symbols of honor. In the process of creating this monument, Tacitus weighs the value of deference to a monarch. At the same time, he rejects the extreme form of obedience that would keep him silent about a family member’s *res gestae*; as he claims in the preface, the Roman aristocracy is recovering from the “disease” of enslavement after restrictions on free speech had been lifted.¹¹¹

While replete with ambiguities, only a few of which can be addressed here, *Agricola* plots a middle path between conventional definitions of honor and the accommodation of autocratic regimes.¹¹² In the programmatic

¹⁰⁶ Tac. *Agr.* 42.4. See Woodman and Kraus (2014: *ad loc.*).

¹⁰⁷ Classen (1988: 98–104); Vielberg (1987: 133, 146–147).

¹⁰⁸ Syme (1958: 25); Birley (2009: 49). On Tacitus’ complex motivations in *Agricola*, see also Devillers (2007); Whitmarsh (2006); Turner (1997).

¹⁰⁹ Sailor (2008: 51–118).

¹¹⁰ Sailor (2008: 64).

¹¹¹ Tac. *Agr.* 3.

¹¹² See also e.g. Tac. *Ann.* 4.20.2–5 (on M. Aemilius Lepidus); 6.8 (speech of M. Terentius).

passage just cited, I would argue, the appearance of *obsequium* alongside *industria* resonates with the strategies that we have seen freedmen use to commemorate *fama*. The social origins of Agricola's combination of virtues (as characterized by Tacitus) are therefore worthy of further consideration. As I have already noted, *obsequium* could be applied to a range of relationships, including those among friends, family members, masters and slaves, and patrons and freedmen. Soldiers owed respectful obedience to commanders, as did conquered peoples to Rome. Nevertheless, until the end of the Julio-Claudian period, *obsequium* frequently carried a pejorative nuance, based in part on the perception that deference could encroach on one's freedom.¹¹³

Q. Curtius Rufus, who probably wrote his *Life of Alexander* under Claudius, represents Alexander as having issued a dictum about the relationship between political authority and obedience: "Supreme power is softened by deference" (*obsequio mitigantur imperia*).¹¹⁴ Along similar lines, studies of Tacitus and Pliny have suggested that *obsequium* became a watchword of the Roman aristocracy by the beginning of the second century CE. This argument, notably advanced by Syme, rests on the definition of *obsequium* as "rational deference to authority – the obedience which an officer owes to his commander, a senator to the Senate, an emperor to the gods of the Roman State."¹¹⁵ Over the course of the principate, the word came to signify in elite political discourse a general attitude of service, directed not only toward the *princeps* but also toward the community at large.¹¹⁶

Military discipline provided one possible model for this revaluation of *obsequium* among the imperial aristocracy.¹¹⁷ Obedience to an autocrat like Domitian may have been more palatable when perceived in terms

¹¹³ On the development of the concept from republic to empire, see Pani (1992: 159–180).

¹¹⁴ Curt. 8.8.8.

¹¹⁵ Syme (1958: 28), citing Plin. *Ep.* 8.23.5, 10.3a.3, 10.100; *Panegyricus* 9.3, 9.5, 78.1. See also Vielberg (1987: 130–134). Tacitus most commonly applies *obsequium* to deference toward monarchical authority (*Ger.* 44.1; *Dial.* 40.2, 41.3; *Hist.* 1.15.5, 19.1; 2.87.4; 4.3.5, 8.1; *Ann.* 2.43.3; 3.16.7, 55.5, 65.2, 75.3; 4.20.5; 6.8.7; 14.13.1) and in an expressly military context (*Agr.* 8.1, 8.3; *Hist.* 1.80.3, 83.5, 84.2; 2.19.3, 97.1; 3.15.1, 50.3, 59.1; 4.19.2, 27.4, 56.2; *Ann.* 1.19.3, 28.9, 40.1, 43.5; 3.12.4; 4.18.2). The other main political usage is the obedience paid by provincials to Rome (*Agr.* 30.3; *Ger.* 29.3; *Hist.* 3.5.2; 4.71.2; *Ann.* 4.72.1; 12.11.1; 14.31.1). Describing a debate about penalties for ungrateful freedmen under Nero (*Ann.* 13.26), Tacitus portrays one side as having argued that freedmen should be able to keep their freedom "through the same *obsequium* through which they had earned it" (*per idem obsequium retinendi libertatem per quod adsecuti sint*).

¹¹⁶ Forbis (1996: 53–55); Pani (1992: 170–179).

¹¹⁷ Pani (1992: 159–180).

of military hierarchy. *Industria*, which Tacitus pairs with *obsequium*, also had a place in the network of traditional military and political virtues. Embraced in particular by “new men,” *industria* became a key trait for administrators, including freed slaves, as well as for “good” emperors like Trajan.¹¹⁸ In Tacitus’ formulation, Agricola’s *industria* flourished primarily in military settings, whereas civil posts at Rome required a reserved approach, bordering on inactivity.¹¹⁹ It is therefore tempting to attribute the increased importance of both virtues to the emperor’s role as commander-in-chief, a familiar model which the elite could transfer easily from the battlefield to the court.

Yet the specter of slavery looms so large in *Agricola* that models from slave and freed culture cannot be ignored. For Tacitus, obedience to Domitian at Rome differs qualitatively from respect for superior officers on campaign. In Britain, Agricola’s restraint signals the integrity of the traditional economy of honor outside the reach of the *princeps*.¹²⁰ In the capital, by contrast, the metaphor of enslavement governs Agricola’s acquiescence to the demands of autocracy. Whereas Calgacus’ rejection of *obsequium* and *modestia* in his battle speech leads to ruin, Agricola blunts Domitian’s savagery by displaying those very qualities.¹²¹ Under the shadow of a tyrant, aristocratic *obsequium* more closely resembles the behavior expected from slaves and freedmen than from soldiers or sons. Seeking to protect his legacy, Agricola fades into the “mob of those serving” (*turbæ servientium*), despite a reputation for martial virtue.¹²²

While Agricola’s civil posts and retirement are largely marked by inaction, Tacitus reports that he undertook an inventory of temple treasures under the less tyrannical Galba with “most careful scrutiny” (*diligentissima conquisitione*).¹²³ More importantly, even after his retirement, the energy that Agricola had exercised in his military career remained an integral part of his *fama*.¹²⁴ In this way, an equilibrium between *obsequium* and *industria* contributes to the overarching persona that Tacitus constructs for his father-in-law, despite the virtues’ partiality to different spheres of activity.¹²⁵ As a literary monument that addresses the problems of honor and memory under monarchical rule, the work participates in

¹¹⁸ Pignatelli (1996); Forbis (1996: 72–76).

¹¹⁹ See especially Tac. *Agr.* 6.3, 40.4.

¹²⁰ Sailor (2008: 89–92).

¹²¹ Woodman and Kraus (2014: 23); cf. Lavan (2013: 127–142).

¹²² Tac. *Agr.* 40.3; see Sailor (2008: 96–103).

¹²³ Tac. *Agr.* 6.5.

¹²⁴ Tac. *Agr.* 41.3.

¹²⁵ On Agricola’s virtues, see especially Vielberg (1987: 26–48).

the commemorative politics of its age. Tacitus does not explicitly cast Agricola as a quasi-*libertus*, and his treatment of Domitian's freed advisors is characteristically disapproving.¹²⁶ However, the path that Tacitus charts for those seeking to be good under bad emperors echoes strategies found in ex-slaves' monuments, which demonstrated the efficacy of qualifying *industria* with normative virtues.

Nor was Agricola alone in devising such a solution. Even Domitius Corbulo, whom Nero forced to commit suicide in 66 CE, struck a balance between effective generalship and measured obedience for much of his career.¹²⁷ His conservative outlook led him to comment (in response to Claudius' order that he withdraw his troops from across the Rhine) that "Roman generals used to be blessed" (*beatos quondam duces Romanos*).¹²⁸ Nevertheless, Corbulo maintained his loyalty to the reigning *princeps* until Nero precipitated his downfall.¹²⁹ His apparent capacity to temper ambition with the realities of imperial politics may have prompted Tiridates to remark to Nero that "you have a good slave in Corbulo."¹³⁰ Although people likely encouraged Corbulo to set his sights on the principate, he declined to turn his troops on Rome in open revolt.¹³¹

Loyalty and deference could not promote a senatorial or equestrian career without the attendant qualities that made any aristocrat good at his job. Corbulo was known for endurance and experience in the field, virtues that became even more pronounced in light of the embarrassing defeat of Caesennius Paetus in 62 CE.¹³² Dio cites physical strength, courage, and intelligence, as well as parentage and fair treatment of friends and enemies.¹³³ When exercised with the proper level of respect for authority, these traits would have paved the way to honor, just as they had for generations of

¹²⁶ E.g. Tac. *Agr.* 41.4.

¹²⁷ On Corbulo's competitiveness with other members of the elite, see Tac. *Ann.* 15.5.

¹²⁸ Tac. *Ann.* 11.20.

¹²⁹ On the possibility of Corbulo's posing a serious threat to Nero's reign, particularly in the poorly documented conspiracy of Vinicianus, see Cappelletti (1992–1993); Vervaeke (2002); Hammond (1934: 102–103). Hammond argued that Corbulo was willing to resist the emperor's wishes to a degree, and that the general's loyalty was not to Nero *per se* but to the state (p. 94). But Corbulo remains a useful exemplar of the changing aristocratic ethos, because (for Tacitus) his actions reflect the exigencies of operating within a monarchical system.

¹³⁰ Dio Cass. 62.6.4. Dio interprets this comment as a jibe at Nero's indulgent behavior, since only a good slave could brook such a master. But in light of Tiridates' elaborate displays of obsequiousness during the ceremonies surrounding his receipt of the diadem, it is possible to interpret the remark as having been more straightforward than Dio suggests.

¹³¹ Remarkd upon by Dio Cass. 62.19.3–4, 62.23.5–6.

¹³² Corbulo's endurance is mentioned, for instance, at Tac. *Ann.* 13.35; 14.24.1. On the defeat of Paetus and the contrast with Corbulo, see Tac. *Ann.* 15.10–17, 15.25; Dio Cass. 62.21–22.

¹³³ Dio Cass. 62.19.2.

summi viri. However, the integration of these traditional virtues with *obsequium* defined a new standard according to which members of the elite might hope to achieve lasting fame.

These features of Roman commemorative culture in the early empire suggest an alignment between aristocratic modes of comportment and strategies developed by former slaves.¹³⁴ In the [next chapter](#), I argue that these correlations stemmed in part from ex-slaves' role as *exempla*. However, for the present moment, I wish only to observe the suggestive parallel between freed slaves' epigraphic practices and aristocrats' "middle path" to glory. Members of the senatorial and equestrian orders might implement this strategy to achieve a *cursus* worthy of public acclaim, although other options were available to them, including opting out altogether. Strategies of moderation were by no means foolproof; a tyrant could execute or send into exile even his most obedient subjects, and changes in the political terrain could force one's hand at an unfortunate moment. Nevertheless, *obsequium* and *industria* presented a viable alternative to violent means of resistance like suicide and insurrection. Freed slaves proffered one mature, readily available model for how to transform expectations of obedience into virtues and achievements that would warrant memorialization.

Slaves of God

In roughly the same epoch as the Roman aristocracy witnessed this reorientation of its commemorative practices, Christianity proliferated through cities and towns across the Mediterranean. Slavery's role in the rise of the church lies beyond the scope of the present study, but any discussion of how the Roman elite appropriated servile models ought to address, if only briefly, the introduction of Christian ideals into the cultural mainstream. According to Nietzsche's famous theory, carried to brutal extremes by the Nazis, Christianity was a "slave religion" that imported Judaism's "reversal of the aristocratic value equation" and brought qualities like patience, industry, and humility into the consciousness of the elite.¹³⁵ Nietzsche spoke in terms of slaves' morality, rather than of performance; without this distinction between outward behavior and subjectivity, the perceived values of slaves replicate norms instituted by masters but say little about slave culture itself.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Cf. Leppin (1996: 82–83).

¹³⁵ Nietzsche (1996: 19–28).

¹³⁶ Glancy (2002: 131–132).

Bearing this in mind, I have nevertheless found it productive to ask how early Christian thinkers engaged models generated by slaves and freedmen to define a path toward immortality. In that respect, I share Patterson's objective of tracing the impact of Roman slavery and manumission on Pauline thought, although my interests lie more in the strategic deployment of virtues than in conceptions of freedom *per se*.¹³⁷ In the case of Paul, embracing one's metaphorical enslavement to God or Christ provided a means of attaining eternal life. Paul uses the language of slavery and freedom in ways that correlate with the rhetoric of non-Christian authors, who adapted the same conceptual frameworks to achieve different ends. The cultivation of servile behaviors to gain life after death adds another dimension to the process by which traditional Roman and Christian cultures eventually came to terms with each other. I would suggest, albeit tentatively, that freedmen contributed to this broader development by defining service and deference as a legitimate basis for memory.

In Paul's writings, the imagery of slavery, manumission, and freedom help to define a nascent Christian ethos.¹³⁸ In Galatians, for instance, Paul affirms that the members of the early church "were called to freedom" but warns against using that freedom as license for indulgence; rather, he advises, "serve (δουλεύετε) each other through love."¹³⁹ This fits into Paul's egalitarianism, which expands on the formula "there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are one in Jesus Christ."¹⁴⁰ In a similar way as the Stoics, with whom his philosophy shares many connections, Paul advocates for the erasure of spiritual boundaries while accepting the hierarchical structure of the society in which he and his constituents lived.¹⁴¹ His letters display no more of an abolitionist stance than do Stoic texts of the empire – that is to say, none at all, without serious effort on the part of the modern reader.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Patterson (1991: 316–344) links Paul's formulation of spiritual freedom to Roman processes of release from slavery, including *postliminium*, adoption, and manumission as a gift exchange that requires obedience.

¹³⁸ On Christian metaphors of slavery in general, see Glancy (2011: 457–461); Garnsey (1996: 17–19); Combès (1998); Byron (2003). The epistles in the New Testament that are generally agreed to be authentic to Paul are: 1 Thess., Gal., 1 Cor., 2 Cor., Rom., Phil., and Philem.; see Meeks and Fitzgerald (2007: xiv).

¹³⁹ Gal. 5:13.

¹⁴⁰ Gal. 3:28. Cf. 1 Cor. 12:13 and Col. 3:11. The formula, it should be noted, is generally associated with baptismal liturgy, rather than being of Paul's own devising.

¹⁴¹ On the relationship between Stoicism and early Christian morality, see Thorsteinsson (2010: esp. 175–189 on social issues); Garnsey (1996: 18–19). Paul's relationship to the Stoics had been methodically treated by Engberg-Pedersen (2000).

¹⁴² Efforts to ascribe to Paul a more liberal view nevertheless must concede that he never suggests an eradication of the institution as such, but at the most promotes manumission. On ancient moral

The “slave of God” *topos* that appears so frequently in Paul has roots in the Old Testament, as well as in Near Eastern political and religious language.¹⁴³ On one level, these traditions may explain the appearance of the metaphor in early Christian texts; to cite Martin’s summary of the problem, New Testament scholars have emphasized this genealogy under the belief that assuming the position of a slave would have been anathema to inhabitants of the Greco-Roman world.¹⁴⁴ Not only does this claim ignore such genres as Latin elegy, in which elite Roman authors embraced metaphorical servitude to build their poetic personae, it also vests the metaphor’s greatest significance in its origins, rather than its contemporary context. Like Martin, I subscribe to the view that metaphors and other types of figurative language are socially embedded and derive a substantial amount of their meaning from the settings in which they are used.¹⁴⁵ Pauline metaphors of slavery and liberation may therefore be read in dialogue with Roman social and cultural history, as well as from a theological perspective.

Paul’s familiarity with Roman-style slavery and, more specifically, with the epigraphic habit of *liberti* is a starting point for such an interpretation. On the one hand, Paul would have been immersed in the type of urban slave-owning practiced by local aristocrats in the Greek East.¹⁴⁶ Greek manumission encompassed a diverse set of practices, from sacral modes to testation, but differed from the Roman system in important respects. As I have already noted, the Romans’ custom of enfranchising *liberti* on a regular basis was distinctive. Roman citizens residing in the Eastern provinces would have been eligible to utilize legal forms like *vindicta*, but the evidence that they regularly did so is limited.¹⁴⁷ Paul’s most extensive encounter with private freedmen is likely to have occurred in Corinth, where he founded a church c. 51 CE. Resettled under Caesar by colonists drawn largely from the freed population, early imperial Corinth

arguments against slavery, see the meager sources compiled by Garnsey (1996: 75–86). Harrill (2006: 165–192) discusses how pro- and anti-slavery debates in the United States affected exegesis of the New Testament.

¹⁴³ Garnsey (1996: 18).

¹⁴⁴ Martin (1990: xvi).

¹⁴⁵ See especially Lakoff and Johnson (1980); Lakoff (1993). On the relationship between metaphor and culture in the classical world, see e.g. Roller (2001: 217–220); Morales (2005); Shaw (2013).

¹⁴⁶ On Greek manumission, see especially Zelnick-Abramovitz (2005). The problem of distinguishing Jewish from Greco-Roman practices is addressed by Hezser (2011); see also Hezser (2005). For manumission in early Christian and Jewish contexts, see Harrill (1995: 53–65); Glancy (2002: 92–96).

¹⁴⁷ For adaptations of Roman forms by Greeks, see Zelnick-Abramovitz (2005: 117–118, 132, n. 5); Salsano (1998: 180, n. 4); primary evidence includes e.g. *IGRR* 3.801, 802; *PDiog.* 6, 7.

still contained a significant number of *liberti*, some of whom held local magistracies.¹⁴⁸

The metaphors of slavery and freedom in Paul's letters would have been relevant to individuals across the status hierarchy, although they may have held unique significance for slaves and ex-slaves themselves. Pauline congregations incorporated a diverse cross-section of society, excluding only the highest echelons, the extremely poor, and inhabitants of rural areas.¹⁴⁹ Women's contributions to the expansion of Christianity during Paul's time and in later centuries have also been well studied.¹⁵⁰ Slaves and freedmen were present in these churches from an early stage, but not to a degree that would qualify Christianity as a "slave religion" in any demographic sense of the phrase.¹⁵¹ Rather, Paul's writings speak to a range of ethnicities, statuses, ranks, and occupations, including categories that were diametrically opposed to each other, such as slave and master.

Interpretations of Paul's views about slavery have rested heavily on his letter to Philemon concerning the return of Onesimus, who is generally agreed to have been a runaway slave.¹⁵² Having converted Onesimus to Christianity, Paul hopes that Philemon will receive that man "no longer as slave, but better than a slave, as a beloved brother."¹⁵³ Paul's intentions are best interpreted according to a principle that appears in the works of his followers, namely that slaves should obey their human masters just as they obey God.¹⁵⁴ Although this prescription may not have come directly from Paul, it reflects a general assumption that spiritual unity among human beings did not erase status boundaries. The idea that everyone shares a heavenly master justifies language about the treatment of slaves, but ultimately reaffirms social norms.¹⁵⁵

A notoriously difficult passage in 1 Corinthians presents a similar quandary. Paul addresses Christian slaves as a group: "Were you called while a slave? May it not trouble you – but if you are able to become free, μάλλον χρῆσαι."¹⁵⁶ Some critics understand Paul to be exhorting slaves

¹⁴⁸ Strabo 8.6.23; Spawforth (1996); Martin (1990: xviii); Patterson (1991: 316–324). Cf. Phil. 4:22.

¹⁴⁹ Meeks (1983: 73).

¹⁵⁰ See e.g. Cotter (1994); MacDonald (1996).

¹⁵¹ Meeks (1983: 63–64).

¹⁵² Cotter (2010: 186–189) provides a review of alternative theories; cf. Harrill (2006: 6–11).

¹⁵³ Philem. 15–16.

¹⁵⁴ The deutero-Pauline letter to the Colossians explicitly advises slaves to obey their earthly masters as an act of submission to God (Col. 3:22–25); cf. Eph. 6:5–9 and the other texts collected by Harrill (2006: 88–89).

¹⁵⁵ See especially Col. 4:1; Eph. 6:1; Glancy (2011: 464–468, 476–480).

¹⁵⁶ 1 Cor. 7:21: δοῦλος ἐκλήθης; μή σοι μελέτω ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ δύνασαι ἐλευθέρως γενέσθαι, μάλλον χρῆσαι.

“to make use of the opportunity to become free,” one possible translation for χρῆσαι. Others argue that Paul wants Christian slaves to decline offers of manumission and instead “to make use of slavery.”¹⁵⁷ The context of this passage is Paul’s advice to converts that “each of you ought to remain in the station (ἐν τῇ κλήσει) that you were in when God called you.”¹⁵⁸ Betrothed virgins are an exception, because they still ought to marry. If Paul is offering similar advice to slaves, the first interpretation of χρῆσαι would be preferable to the latter. Although Christian slaves should be content with their status, he seems to be arguing, they need not refuse a change that is set to occur in the natural course of events.

At certain moments, Paul acknowledges the social diversity of his audience to sharpen his message. Again in 1 Corinthians, he claims that “he who was called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord’s freedman; similarly, he who was called when free is Christ’s slave.”¹⁵⁹ Here, Paul overlays legal and metaphorical slavery in a chiasmic structure that reflects the various backgrounds of his audience members, some of whom had been baptized in servitude, others of whom were freed or freeborn when admitted to the Christian sect.¹⁶⁰ He prompts legal slaves to understand their submission to God as a figurative manumission, not into a state of unmitigated liberty but into a new relationship of dependence. Those who became Christians when free, on the other hand, ought to conceptualize that transition as enslavement.

Consensus has moved away from the suggestion that the “slave of God” *topos* relies on the Greek practice of sacral manumission, whereby masters freed their slaves through fictive sale to Apollo or another god.¹⁶¹ This would also militate against the idea that “the Lord’s freedmen” at 1 Corinthians 7:21 connotes a simple transition from a human to a divine master. Rather, the meaning of ἀπελεύθερος stems from the continued relationship of benefits and obligations that bound ancient freedmen to their patrons.¹⁶² Christian slaves who become the notional freedmen of God owe loyalty and deference to their divine patron, whereas free Christians should think of themselves as God’s slaves. Paul’s goal is not to award Christian slaves an elevated spiritual standing, but rather to convey the radical change that

¹⁵⁷ For a survey of the debate, see Harrill (1995: 74–108). I am persuaded by the philological arguments of Harrill (1995: 108–121).

¹⁵⁸ 1 Cor. 7:20, 25–28.

¹⁵⁹ 1 Cor. 7:22.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Meeks (1983: 64).

¹⁶¹ Martin (1990: xvi).

¹⁶² Lyall (1970); Martin (1990: 63–68).

was initiated by entry into the faith.¹⁶³ He adjusts the metaphors of slavery and freedom to appeal to different groups within these congregations. By contrast, in the fourth century, Ambrose would use the patron–freedman relationship as an overarching paradigm, according to which adherents of Christianity ought to treat Christ as a patron and offer their humble service.¹⁶⁴

Despite his apparent attentiveness to different social perspectives, Paul draws on common stereotypes to define the paradigmatic servant of God. He specifies positive qualities like “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control,” as opposed to, among other vices, “enmity, discord, jealousy, anger, selfish ambition, dissension, factions, and envy.”¹⁶⁵ Throughout his epistles, Paul emphasizes obedience as a core virtue, with the stipulation that the controlling power be God or righteousness, rather than sin.¹⁶⁶ By praising humility and subservience, in terms of both religious outlook and human interaction, he encourages his followers to embrace the largely Judaic concept that submission to God leads to freedom.¹⁶⁷

Restraint of ambition and respect for the common good are integral to Paul’s ethical platform. Christians ought to eschew conventional markers of birth, wealth, and status in favor of the precept of Jeremiah 9:24, “Let those who boast boast in the Lord.”¹⁶⁸ In Philippians, the model of Christ’s servitude and obedience strengthens the exhortation: “Do nothing according to ambition or vanity, but in humility value others above yourselves.”¹⁶⁹ Pride in anything other than dutiful service to God undermines the principle of spiritual enslavement. Paul is careful to remind his constituents of the dangers of misguided ambition, for as fellow slaves and co-workers in God’s household, “who are you to judge another person’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls.”¹⁷⁰ Slavery provides a ready store of images with which to express the value of respecting one’s limits.

¹⁶³ Cf. Martin (1990: 65–68).

¹⁶⁴ Ambrose, *Iac.* 1.3.12; see Harper (2011: 488).

¹⁶⁵ Gal. 5:22–23: ἀγάπη, χαρά, εἰρήνη, μακροθυμία, χρηστότης, ἀγαθωσύνη, πίστις, πραΰτης, ἐγκράτεια; cf. Gal. 5:19–21: πορνεία, ἀκαθαρσία, ἀσέλγεια, εἰδωλολατρία, φαρμακεία, ἔχθραι, ἔρις, ζῆλος, θυμοί, ἐριθείαι, διχοστασίαι, αἰρέσεις, φθόνοι, μέθαι, κῶμοι; also cf. Rom. 1:29.

¹⁶⁶ 1 Cor. 2:9, 7:15, 9:13; Rom. 6:16–18. On the move from sin to salvation as a transfer of masters, see Aageson (1996).

¹⁶⁷ Garnsey (1996: 18).

¹⁶⁸ 2 Cor. 1:26–31; cf. Gal. 6:14; 1 Cor. 3:21, 12:4–8; 2 Cor. 10:13; also, 1 Thess. 4:11–12.

¹⁶⁹ Phil. 2:3–11.

¹⁷⁰ Rom. 14:4.

Ancient constructions of the slave body influence Paul's figurative language in an especially noteworthy way.¹⁷¹ Physical labor and the endurance of hardships, from hunger and thirst to torture, figure centrally in Pauline metaphors of enslavement to God or Christ.¹⁷² Completing a chain of *exempla* that begins with the crucified Jesus, Paul praises the Thessalonians for "your work out of faith, your labor out of love, and your endurance out of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."¹⁷³ The apostle's own bodily suffering offers proof of his status as a servant, humble yet invested with the authority to carry a divine message.¹⁷⁴ Such references to physical suffering and endurance help to propagate servile virtues by using slaves' bodies as rhetorical instruments.¹⁷⁵

There can therefore be little doubt that Paul reinforces prevailing assumptions about slaves and masters and freedmen and patrons. Yet the epistles also identify potential areas of contact between early Christian and servile cultures. In my discussion of freedmen's commemorative strategies, I argued that some *liberti* accommodated virtues like industry, loyalty, honesty, and self-restraint to achieve an afterlife in the form of an inscribed funerary monument. Working in a Judeo-Christian idiom, Paul identifies submission as a step toward glory; here, liberation from sin and willing enslavement to God hold the promise of immortality through salvation.¹⁷⁶ Although the Christian afterlife bears very little resemblance to that bestowed by a non-Christian tomb, its foundation on the performance of humble service correlates with tactics implemented by freedmen.

Paul's letter to the Romans highlights the connection between slavery to God and the hope of life after death:¹⁷⁷

Do you not know that when you offer yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are the slaves of the one whom you obey, whether sin, which leads to death, or obedience, which leads to righteousness ... But now, having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the benefit you reap leads to sanctification and the end result, eternal life.

¹⁷¹ On this feature of Paul's letter to the Galatians, see Glancy (2002: 34–38), with the conclusion that "the structure of Paul's argument is contingent on the somatic configuration of first-century slavery" (p. 38).

¹⁷² See in particular 1 Thess. 1:3, 2:9, 4:11–12; 1 Cor. 4:9; 2 Cor. 1:6, 6:4–10, 10:1, 11:20, 11:23–29; Rom. 2:7.

¹⁷³ 1 Thess. 1:3. Paul's relationship to the Roman tradition of imitating (and surpassing) "great men" is treated by Harrison (2013).

¹⁷⁴ See in particular 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Cor. 11:23–29.

¹⁷⁵ Glancy (2002: 99–101); Briggs (1989).

¹⁷⁶ Martin (1990: 62).

¹⁷⁷ Rom. 6:16 and 22.

On one side of the metaphor, Paul's association of slavery with the body, moral degradation, and death equates slaves with the material and masters with the transcendent. However, Paul's promise that obedience to God will ensure eternal life requires his readers to adopt the perspective of the subordinate party, not merely for the sake of argument, but as a feature of their daily practice. This spiritual submission, if manifest consistently in one's behavior, will supposedly protect the Christian devotee from God's wrath on the Day of Judgment:¹⁷⁸

To those who seek glory, honor, and immortality through endurance in doing good, he will give eternal life. But for those who are ambitious, disobey the truth, and obey evil, there will be wrath and anger.

Although masters and patrons demanded obedience as a matter of course, slaves' and freedmen's use of accommodation as means of survival, both in life and after death, provides another context in which to interpret this language. In contrast to those who pursue public offices and other conventional measures of success, Christians are told to secure an afterlife for themselves "by endurance in doing good" (καθ' ὑπομονὴν ἔργου ἀγαθοῦ). The argument that "glory, honor, and immortality" can be sought in displays of endurance mirrors the structure of inscribed monuments that create lasting fame out of strategic compliance.

This link between spiritual servitude and eternal life also had consequences for Christian epitaphs, although deviations from existing formulae took centuries to mature to the point of visibility in the extant material. Some Christian epitaphs use the phrase "slave of God" and its variants to mark the deceased as a member of the sect, a phenomenon which corresponds to "a noticeable decline in the number of epitaphs that tell the viewer anything about the deceased or what he had achieved in life."¹⁷⁹ For certain members of the early church, pronouncing one's slavery to God in an inscription would have entailed a concomitant shift of attention away from the fruits of ambition. Similarly, Christian epigraphy employs the term *fidelis* as an epithet that indicates dedication to the divine, as opposed to a human master, patron, or spouse.¹⁸⁰ As part of Christianity's basic stock of metaphorical language, such terminology came to function in the mortuary realm as a means of identifying those destined for heaven.

¹⁷⁸ Rom. 2:7–8: τοῖς μὲν καθ' ὑπομονὴν ἔργου ἀγαθοῦ δόξαν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ ἀφθαρσίαν ζητοῦσιν, ζωὴν αἰώνιον τοῖς δὲ ἐξ ἐριθείας καὶ ἀπειθοῦσι τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πειθόμενοις δὲ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ, ὀργὴ καὶ θυμός.

¹⁷⁹ Carroll (2006: 260–278), quotation from p. 275.

¹⁸⁰ Carroll (2006: 268); Sigismund Nielsen (2001).

The metaphor of slavery to God instructed adherents of Christianity to cultivate virtues that held the promise of eternal life, regardless of one's legal status and level of authority with respect to coreligionists or to society as a whole. This conceit provided a benchmark for leaders, as much as it functioned to keep regular congregants in order; with God envisioned as the head-of-household, everyone occupied a subordinate position in the *domus* akin to that of a slave, freedman, or child.¹⁸¹ Even those with governing roles modeled their deference on that of Christ, whose suffering and humility became paradigms of a "pastoral power" that incubated within the early church and was eventually solidified at the level of government.¹⁸² Although Greek and Roman authors were familiar with the metaphor of the enslaved leader – "servants of God" in the Old Testament included figures like Moses and David – the fact that this trope became entrenched in early Christian discourse cannot be explained by tradition alone.¹⁸³

Most importantly for my purposes, Paul represents himself as a slave of God or Christ, or even as "the slave of all," to construct his ethical persona. His humble stance demonstrates how servile virtues legitimate his authority, and he boasts ironically of personal hardships: "Are they servants of Christ? ... I am more of one."¹⁸⁴ Paul's self-proclaimed status as a spiritual slave finds especially vivid expression through the suffering that he undergoes, as a spectacle, "like those condemned to die."¹⁸⁵ He carries influence in part by cataloguing his endurance of bodily trials, from manual labor to homelessness, thirst and hunger, beatings, and imprisonment.¹⁸⁶ In enacting and publicizing a servile character, Paul suggests that he follows the lead of Christ and even bears "the marks of Christ" on his body.¹⁸⁷ Under a guise of obedience, Paul rejects the pursuit of other people's approval in favor of submitting to a monotheistic authority; he purports only to boast about things that reveal his weakness, if this type of rhetoric is needed at all.¹⁸⁸ Using himself as an example, Paul seeks to integrate metaphorical slavery into his discussions of human leadership, with one of his central messages being that the proper form and degree of servility ought to enhance rather than deplete one's position.

¹⁸¹ The configuration of the church as Christ's household is discussed e.g. by Martin (1990: 52–59).

¹⁸² Foucault (2007).

¹⁸³ Garnsey (1996: 18); Martin (1990: 86–116).

¹⁸⁴ 2 Cor. 11:23.

¹⁸⁵ 1 Cor. 4:9.

¹⁸⁶ See especially 1 Thess. 2:9; 1 Cor. 4:11–13; 2 Cor. 6:4–10, 11:23–29; Phil. 1:13.

¹⁸⁷ Gal. 6:17. This phrase probably refers either to the scars that Christ accrued over the course of his mission, or perhaps the branding of Paul as Christ's slave; see Meeks and Fitzgerald (2007: 20, n. 7).

¹⁸⁸ 2 Cor. 11:30; Gal. 1:10.

Obedience and humility open the door to immortality through resurrection on the model of the crucified Jesus. In Philippians, Paul quotes a liturgical hymn that describes Christ's entry into human form as "taking the form of a slave" and, having humbled himself, "becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."¹⁸⁹ Repeating this language, Paul expresses a strong desire to share in Christ's suffering, "becoming like him in death, if, by any means, I might attain resurrection from the dead."¹⁹⁰ In turn, Paul and "those who live as we do" provide models to be imitated, while "enemies of the cross of Christ" stand as negative *exempla* for those who keep eternal salvation as their ultimate goal. Alongside the metaphor of spiritual enslavement, the familiar discourse of exemplarity supports Christian eschatology in Pauline thought.

Even socially oriented readings of the "slave of God" motif in Paul's letters may involve the assumption that Greco-Roman aristocrats would reject the idea as lowly or offensive and would resist metaphors that threatened traditional notions of freedom, masculine agency, and honor. Thus an analysis of Paul's Corinthian correspondence suggests that educated listeners would be shocked by Paul's insistence on servility, whereas the same image "could sound positive to lower-class persons, because it portrays him in a high status-by-association form of slavery, as a slave of Christ."¹⁹¹ Paul does convey awareness that the metaphor of enslavement would be received differently by slaves than by freed or freeborn congregants. However, as I have noted here and discuss in detail in the [next chapter](#), the most high-ranking members of the imperial elite were capable of imagining themselves in the subordinate role of a slave or *libertus*, if only for the sake of argument. In this broader context, Paul's rhetorical tactics would not necessarily have seemed shocking or innovative, even if he used them to convey new ideas.¹⁹²

Conclusion

In a departure from republican practice, the Roman emperor monopolized traditional symbols of civic honor and achievement. A new economy of honor developed around the figure of the monarch based on the exchange of favors and benefits among aristocrats and the *princeps*. This system

¹⁸⁹ Phil. 2:7–8.

¹⁹⁰ Phil. 3:10–11.

¹⁹¹ Martin (1990: 76–77).

¹⁹² Cf. Patterson (1991: 337).

prompted a recalibration of behavioral standards for those at the very top of the social pyramid. As witnessed by Tacitus' literary monument for Agricola, a path to immortal glory opened for those willing to cultivate loyalty, deference, industry, and restraint of ambition. Lasting fame could be awarded to men who struck a balance between self-mastery and obedience to an autocrat. For all its potential to devolve toward extremes, this approach established a middle ground between degradation, on the one hand, and suicide in the name of *libertas*, on the other.

Freedmen generated one potential model for how to manage the tension between accommodation and resistance in a commemorative setting. Tombs commissioned by and for *liberti* constructed positive *fama* for the deceased by balancing depictions of stability and virtue with occupational skill. For freed slaves, these strategies were likely shaped by the experience of enslavement and manumission. The qualities extolled in exemplary literature reflect masters' views about how "good" and "bad" slaves and freedmen ought to behave. Nevertheless, in ex-slaves' commemorations, such norms could be reformulated to provide a basis for the preservation of memory. Despite harboring deep biases against freedmen, especially in cases where wealth and power conflicted with humble status, the imperial elite employed strategies similar to those developed by freedmen to navigate treacherous political terrain.

Pauline Christianity engaged slave and freed culture through the metaphors of slavery to God or Christ and redemption from sin. Paul and his congregants imagined an afterlife that differed vastly from that promised by epitaphs and literary texts, which conveyed a person's earthly deeds to posterity. Nevertheless, through the application of figurative language that drew meaning from its social environment, Paul's epistles indicate that early Christian thought did indeed owe a debt to servile culture. Liberation from sin and enslavement to God, Christ, or righteousness entailed the repeated performance of virtues like humility and endurance, rewarded with life after death. By depicting himself as a slave who suffers the same bodily tortures as did Christ, Paul directs his moral prescriptions not just at the lowly or upwardly mobile segments of society, but also at those in positions of authority.

Studies of aristocratic conversion in the fourth and fifth centuries CE have identified a tension between traditional ideals like *honor* and *virtus* and Christianity's more passive virtues.¹⁹³ Already in the first century,

¹⁹³ See Salzmann (2002: ix-xiii); Praet (1992–1993); Mathisen (2002–2003) provides a helpful summary of the main approaches, as well as a critique of Salzmann's work. Cf. Watts (2015) for a generational approach to the problem of elite conversion.

Pauline metaphors of slavery may have interacted productively with contemporary commemorative practices and engendered significant parallels with the thought and behavior of the non-Christian elite. Slavery and manumission created an environment in which strategies of accommodation might contribute to personal and collective survival, both during life and in the funereal realm, where *personae* might be inscribed after death. As participants in the web of cultures embraced by the Roman empire, *liberti* were able to contribute to a broader conversation about how best to achieve immortality in a highly stratified world.

Cultural Exchange in Roman Society

Reading texts like *Agricola* against the epigraphic evidence suggests that members of the imperial elite embraced commemorative strategies similar to those used by ex-slaves, albeit in different contexts. However, establishing causality requires further examination, both because Roman aristocrats were accustomed to derive behavioral models from an array of social categories, and because the limited freedom bestowed on *liberti* differed from the ideal of *libertas* in fundamental respects. This chapter examines literary evidence for the aristocracy's appropriation of freed culture, as well as some of the probable mechanisms for exchange across status boundaries. I begin by addressing the fact that Roman metaphors of political slavery and liberation often suppress ex-slaves' dependency on their former masters. Self-styled liberators claimed that the state's freedom had been fully restored and, during periods of transition, eschewed making any obvious claims to the metaphorical role of a master or patron.¹ Nevertheless, the emperor's function as a patron of the upper orders and of his own *liberti* ultimately brought the freed and freeborn elites into alignment with one another.

This prompts the question of precisely what mechanisms would have enabled members of the Roman elite to use freed slaves to guide their own conduct. One answer might be that aristocrats simply recirculated their own ideas about how *liberti* ought to behave, rather than attending to the strategies that actual freedmen employed. Whereas ex-slaves by necessity must have reacted to norms propagated by ancient literature (among other modes of transmission), measuring influence from the bottom up is a more difficult proposition. In an analysis of slaves in Latin literature, Joshel has argued persuasively that "whether metaphoric or literal, paternalism requires and consumes slaves as human subjects and agents."² Using

¹ On *libertas* as a political concept, see especially Brunt (1988); Wirszubski (1950); Hellegouarc'h (1963: 542–565); Arena (2012); Stylow (1972); Roller (2001: 218–223).

² Joshel (2011: 239–240).

Trimalchio as a test case, I develop this model of consumption, while also stressing that *liberti* actively generated many of the forms that Petronius exploits for his readers. In this way, as in many others, Roman aristocrats consumed what ex-slaves created in the course of pursuing elite political goals and examining elite concerns.

Petronian satire shows that aristocrats in the first century CE were alert to ex-slaves' commemorative practices, but the novel hardly recommends Trimalchio and his fellow freedmen as positive *exempla*. Nevertheless, I would argue, the consumption of freed culture by Petronius constituted one aspect of a broader dialogue between ex-slaves and the elite. Satirical portraits of wealthy *liberti* like those in the *Cena Trimalchionis* present a distorted amalgam of practices that are attested in the archaeological and epigraphic records. These distortions of freed slaves' culture indicate the existence of a feedback loop, whereby aristocrats appropriated strategies that ex-slaves undertook in response to societal pressures. In the remainder of the chapter, a series of case studies helps to fill out this basic picture, not by offering radically new readings, but by situating select works of Roman literature within the cultural dynamics I am seeking to map. Whereas Petronius' viewpoint is primarily that of a critic, Horace and Seneca engage freedmen through a process of constructive identification, as well as through negative stereotyping. These authors suggest that when members of the elite wrote and read about former slaves, they consumed not merely their own biases, but also the products of a thriving subculture.

The aristocracy's capacity to identify with *liberti* may in turn account for the appeal of Phaedrus' *Fables* to readers of Latin poetry in the early principate. In a final case study, I build on the insight that fable, like Roman comedy, presents modern critics with an opportunity to examine the interaction between elite and popular cultures in Greco-Roman antiquity.³ Although Phaedrus' status as an ex-slave has recently come under scrutiny, his chosen genre and the tradition surrounding his work suggest that he was an imperial freedman. At the very least, ancient readers would have viewed a collection of animal fables in light of the genre's self-proclaimed origins in slave and freed culture. On these grounds, the appearance of Phaedrus' collection around the middle of the first century CE can be taken as evidence that servile strategies for managing power relationships were relevant to aristocrats during the transition to and solidification of monarchy.

³ Comedy: Richlin (2014); cf. McCarthy (2000); see also Stewart (2012). Fable: Henderson (2001); Morgan (2007: 57–83); Kurke (2011); Forsdyke (2012). See above, pp. 19–20.

Political Metaphor and Social Thought

Of all the relationships that structured Roman society, that between master and slave best approximated the power that “bad” emperors wielded over their elite subjects. Senators who resorted to flattery of an autocrat could be indicted for servile (and effeminate) behavior.⁴ Tacitus, for instance, had a penchant for unveiling the slavishness of the Senate in the face of autocracy. Famously, in the opening chapters of *Annales*, he describes how Augustus took over the functions of the Senate, magistrates, and laws (*munia senatus magistratuum legum in se trahere*) and how members of the elite strove to gain wealth and titles through willing submission to the emperor’s authority (*quanto quis servitio promptior, opibus et honoribus extollerentur*).⁵ Here, as elsewhere, Tacitus draws on a common motif that associated excessive political compliance with subjection to chattel slavery. The language of slaveholding sharpens his criticism of aristocrats who were content to vie for official honors that had been cheapened by monarchy.

By contrast, Roman authors often construe “good” emperors as fathers or fellow citizens, alternatives to the master–slave paradigm that protected the dignity of the upper orders.⁶ Pliny, in his panegyric for Trajan, celebrates the dawning of a new age in which “we speak not of a tyrant, but of a citizen, not of a master, but of a parent” (*non de domino, sed de parente loquimur*).⁷ Although Pliny praises the return of freedom after a period of metaphorical slavery, he falls short of casting the *princeps* as the patron of a manumitted Rome, perhaps for obvious reasons. Because of the social stigma attached to *liberti*, it would have been distasteful in this setting to characterize the relationship between the emperor and the elite as one between patron and freedman, no matter how accurate such a description may have been.⁸

In some contexts, such as early Christian accounts of salvation, release from metaphorical servitude leads to a new state of dependency, a structure

⁴ Joshel (2011: 230–231); Roller (2001: 223–227).

⁵ Tac. *Ann.* 1.2.

⁶ Father-son model: Roller (2001: 233–247). *Civilis princeps*: Wallace-Hadrill (1982).

⁷ Plin. *Panegyricus* 2.4.

⁸ Patterson (1991: 258–263) argues that the patron–freedman relationship provided a model for the emperor’s relationship with the Roman people, even as the elite retained initially a commitment to civic freedom. I find Patterson’s argument compelling at a structural level, since the increased importance of *obsequium* among the upper orders suggests an alignment with the position of *liberti*. However, political metaphors in texts like the *Res Gestae* and in imperial coinage tend to avoid making this connection explicit, perhaps to appeal to republican values and to accommodate elite social prejudice.

which echoes the imbalances faced by former slaves.⁹ However, generally speaking, metaphors of slavery and freedom in Roman political discourse tend to disregard the obligations that manumitted slaves had to ex-masters. Lamenting Rome's enslavement to a faction or tyrant was an effective means of critiquing autocracy, despite the prominence given to virtues like *obsequium* by imperial aristocrats, including Pliny.¹⁰ Envisioning the state's return to freedom as manumission from slavery entailed a rhetorical sleight of hand, since the actual status of most freedmen differed from the notion of *libertas* that users of the metaphor wished to advance. To claim that Rome's freedom had been reinstated, emperors and other political agents needed to sidestep the fact that manumission created not a fully autonomous citizen but a *libertus* under the supervision of his patron.

This feature of political discourse did not prevent ex-slaves from becoming emblems of monarchy or from being used as *exempla*, as I will argue below, but they do suggest that the imagery of manumission needed to be controlled in such contexts. One way to circumvent the negative implications of manumission was to assume the role of *adsertor libertatis*, a technical phrase roughly translated as "restorer of freedom." In the procedure for *manumissio vindicta*, one of the formal modes through which ex-slaves became citizens, a third-party participant known as the *adsertor* proclaimed the slave to be free.¹¹ This ceremony required master and slave to appear before a magistrate, along with the *adsertor*. The *adsertor* touched the slave with a wand and attested that person's freedom; if the master did not object, the magistrate validated the claim. Like *manumissio censu*, this procedure operated on the assumption that the slave was rightfully free.¹² It imitated a process whereby people who had been illegally enslaved could appeal their status in court (*vindicatio in libertatem*) and may have had roots in the involvement of the archaic community in the act of manumitting a slave.¹³

The phrase *adsertor libertatis* and related titles allowed political actors under the empire to represent themselves in republican terms.¹⁴ I cite

⁹ See above, pp. 61–70.

¹⁰ Emphasized by Roller (2001: 214–233, 247–264).

¹¹ On manumission procedures, see Mouritsen (2011a: 10–13); Gardner (1993: 8–11); Watson (1987: 23–28). On the presence of an *adsertor* at the *vindicta* ceremony, see Treggiari (1969: 21–23).

¹² Mouritsen (2011a: 11–12); Watson (1987: 25).

¹³ Gardner (1993: 10) argues that "the whole charade could be viewed as a fossilised mini-assembly, with the *adsertor* symbolically asserting the people's will and so conferring freedom as well as citizenship on the erstwhile slave."

¹⁴ Mommsen (1881) argued that the metaphor signaled an eradication of monarchy, not the replacement of a "bad" emperor with a "good" one. See also Roller (2001: 214–215); Walser (1955: 353–362).

here a few notable examples. Augustus states in the *Res Gestae* that “I freed Rome from the mastery of a faction” (*a dominatione factionis ... in libertatem vindicavi*); and an Ephesian cistophorus from the 20s BCE identifies him as “the defender of the freedom of the Roman people” (*libertatis p(opuli) R(omani) vindex*).¹⁵ The phrase established Augustus as a third-party actor who intervened on behalf of the state, which had wrongly been held in captivity.¹⁶ In the late 60s CE, coinage produced during the revolt of Civilis bore the legend *adsertor libertatis publicae*.¹⁷ Vespasian reiterated these words on coins minted in 71 to advertise the legitimacy of his accession.¹⁸ On the one hand, it has been noted that *libertas* coins are statistically rare when compared to other types.¹⁹ However, they provide valuable evidence for how Roman political players (whatever their actual powers and designs may have been) harnessed the role of the third-party *adsertor*, who assisted in dissolving the master–slave relationship but placed no claims of patronage on the former slave.

The manumission cap (*pilleus*) was a more ambiguous symbol of political freedom than was legal terminology.²⁰ The cap could signify *libertas* in a general sense, without implying dependency or degrading the wearer. This must be the logic of Brutus’ famous *pilleus* coinage, which commemorated the eradication of tyranny after the assassination of Caesar.²¹ Likewise, both Galba and Vitellius issued coins featuring the goddess Libertas, who holds a *pilleus*, wand, and other conventional accouterments; she is accompanied by such legends as *libertas publica* (“the people’s freedom”) and *libertas restituta* (“freedom restored”).²² It is difficult to impute to such images an underlying impetus to conceptualize Rome as an ex-slave and, by extension, the state’s liberators as metaphorical patrons. In these settings, the *pilleus* seems simply to indicate a transition from slave to free without accounting for the obligations and handicaps imposed on *liberti*.

¹⁵ *RGDA* 1.1; *RIC* 1st Augustus 476; cf. *Caes. Bell. Afr.* 22.2; *BCiv.* 1.22.5. See Welwei (2004: 217–229); Stylow (1972: 20–33).

¹⁶ Watson (1991: 60); Roller (2001: 214–215); cf. Stylow (1972: 29–30).

¹⁷ *RIC* 1st Civil Wars 130; cf. 132 and 133; cf. *Plin. HN* 20.160.4.

¹⁸ *RIC* 2nd Vespasian 35, 121–124, 207–210; Watson (1991).

¹⁹ Stylow (1972: 202–237) reviews Libertas coins and related types from the republic and empire. Noreña (2011: 176–177) notes the rarity of Libertas types in the period from 69 to 235 CE.

²⁰ See Arena (2012: 31–44).

²¹ *RRC* 508/3; *Dio Cass.* 47.25.3; cf. *RIC* 1st Caligula 39, 45, 52; *RIC* 1st Civil Wars 24 and 25.

²² *RIC* 1st Galba 22, 37–39, 56, 68–76, 136–137, 139, 157–159, 237, 275, 309–310, 318, 328, 346–349, 363–367, 372, 387–391, 423–427, 459–461; cf. 293–296, 327, 422, 436–443. *RIC* 1st Vitellius 9, 43–44, 69, 80–81, 104–105; cf. 128.

However, in other contexts, the *pilleus* was occasionally worn as a sign of dependency and gratitude.²³ Prusias II of Bithynia presented himself to Roman officials with a shaved head, *pilleus*, and toga in an act of creative diplomacy. The maneuver may have seemed wise from Prusias' standpoint, but the incident is treated by Polybius and later historians with disapproval, even disgust.²⁴ By contrast, among Roman citizens, donning the *pilleus* could mark one's gratitude for redemption from captivity. Q. Terentius Culleo supposedly wore the cap to express his debt to Scipio, "the author of his freedom, just as if his ex-master," to cite Valerius Maximus (*auctori enim libertatis suae tamquam patrono*).²⁵ During T. Quinctius Flamininus' triumph, two thousand Romans who had been enslaved in Greece wore *pillei* to honor their redeemer.²⁶ And the colonists at Placentia and Cremona are said to have processed in similar garb at the triumph of C. Cornelius Cethegus, who "liberated" these cities from a siege and "redeemed from slavery" those captured by the enemy, as Livy puts it.²⁷

Prusias' behavior aside, these latter cases show that the *pilleus* could convey a sense of obligation without necessarily degrading the wearer. While the characters are drawn from republican history, the stories survived as *exempla*. Valerius Maximus calls Culleo's act of deference a "superior *exemplum*" of gratitude. This positive application of the freedman's cap may help to explain the report that, after Nero's death, the *plebs* donned *pillei* and ran through the streets of Rome.²⁸ If the episode has any merit, the populace may have been prompted not only to celebrate the ousting of a tyrant but also to give thanks to the men who removed him from power. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the language and iconography of manumission usually indicated movement from conceptual slavery to full-fledged *libertas*, rather than to freedman status. From the perspective of those who used the metaphor to advance their political agendas, the condition of *liberti* after manumission raised too many questions to be advantageous.

That is not to say that metaphors of slavery and freedom were devoid of nuance or contradiction, or that members of the elite could deny entirely the persistence of autocratic principles from one regime to another. In

²³ See Mouritsen (2011a: 147).

²⁴ Polyb. 30.18; Livy 45.44; App. *Mith.* 1.2; Diod. 31.15. Cf. Livy 39.26.7–8 on Philip V's indictment of the Thessalians as ungrateful freedmen with respect to their Roman liberators; see Lavan (2013: 120).

²⁵ Val. Max. 5.2.5; see also Livy 30.45.5, 38.55.2.

²⁶ Val. Max. 5.2.6.

²⁷ Livy 33.23.

²⁸ Suet. *Ner.* 57.1.

his *Panegyricus*, Pliny exalts Trajan because “you order us to be free ... you order us to express openly what we think” (*iubes esse liberos ... iubes quae sentimus promere in medium*). Paradoxically, he warns of the indignity that arises “if we show greater *obsequium* to emperors who delight in the servitude of the citizens than to those who delight in freedom.”²⁹ These kinds of statement articulate the fundamental ascendancy of any *princeps*, whether conceived as a tyrannical master or as a father and fellow citizen. A similar sentiment can be found at the beginning of Tacitus’ *Histories*, when the historian praises the new political climate, in which one is “allowed” (*licet*) to think and speak freely.³⁰ The idea that freedom is a benefit bestowed by “good” emperors only thinly masks the imbalance of power that defined Rome’s monarchical government.³¹

In practice, the broad umbrella of patronage furnished an important model for the emperor’s relationship with his elite subjects.³² As the letters of Pliny and Fronto vividly attest, ranks, offices, honors, and other *beneficia* were sought and bestowed through a web of patronage that centered on the *princeps*.³³ The ideal of friendship imbued this system with legitimacy in a similar way as it did among private citizens. The title *amicus Caesaris* could refer to members of the imperial entourage but also to people who enjoyed an informal connection to the monarch.³⁴ It has been shown that Pliny’s correspondence with Trajan in book 10 of his *Letters* constructs an intimate friendship between a benevolent patron and grateful client, in addition to serving the pragmatic needs of the provincial administration.³⁵ In such settings, the emperor’s status as a patron with respect to aristocrats would have approximated that of elite heads-of-household who presided over a network of freeborn dependents.

Men like Pliny could maintain their dignity while construing the emperor as a patron, since patronal relations between freeborn aristocrats did not imply dependency to the point of dishonor. However, the categories of elite protégé, low-status client, and *libertus* occasionally

²⁹ Plin. *Panegyricus* 2.5; cf. 66.4.

³⁰ Tac. *Hist.* 1.1.4: *ubi sentire quae velis et quae sentias dicere licet*. See in particular the reading of Haynes (2006: 159–160).

³¹ Cf. Wallace-Hadrill (1982: 38) on how the ritual of *recusatio* and the rhetoric of *libertas* actually proved the emperor’s fundamental power over the Senate and the law.

³² On the emperor as patron of the elite, see von Premenstein (1937: 13–116); Saller (1982: 32–78); MacMullen (1988: 121); Millar (1992: esp. 275–278); Garnsey and Saller (1987: 149–150); cf. Lendon (1997: 11–13); Roller (2001: 129–134).

³³ Saller (1982: 58–69).

³⁴ Williams (2012: 46); Millar (1992: 110–122).

³⁵ Noreña (2007).

impinged on each other. Recommending Gavius Clarus to the emperor Verus, Fronto writes that “our friendship gradually reached the point that neither did it bother him nor shame me that he was obedient to me (*oboedire mihi*) in those things to which clients and faithful, hard-working freedmen submit (*obsequuntur*).”³⁶ Fronto’s pointed use of *oboedire* and *obsequi* recall the centrality of *obsequium* to the advancement of equestrian and senatorial careers under monarchical rule. He goes on to describe how he entrusted to Clarus such duties as personal care during bouts of illness and responsibility for his corpse after death. Fronto makes a special case for why his relationship with a younger senator could resemble those he maintained with humbler men without becoming disgraceful. He assimilates *clientes* and *liberti* out of hand while relating virtues associated with service to a fellow aristocrat in search of promotion.³⁷

Although Fronto’s letter is a special case, its treatment of clientage suggests that the boundaries between *cliens* and *libertus* were not always fixed and that qualities appropriate in private patronage could apply to the political sphere. This latter point resonates with the image of the household as a miniature *res publica*. Pliny praises himself for granting deathbed manumissions to sick slaves and for distributing their possessions according to informal wills he allowed them to make. He reflects that “for slaves, the household is a kind of state and quasi-citizenship” (*servis res publica quaedam et quasi civitas est*).³⁸ The analogy is meant to humanize mastery, but it also reveals how governmental and domestic structures could imitate one another. Pliny’s quasi-state for his slaves resembles the monarchy in which he lived, with a central authority overseeing the distribution of statuses and benefits. By comparison, Seneca commends the early Romans for treating the household as a “little republic” (*pusillam rem publicam*); the basis for that analogy is the assertion that slaves could attain honors and pronounce their own judgments.³⁹

None of these texts draw an explicit parallel between freed slaves and the imperial elite. As I argue in the rest of this chapter, the aristocracy’s consumption of strategies developed by freedmen was a more subtle process that relied on identification but usually preserved the social order. However, it should be noted that ex-slaves did come to embody the principate in at least one direct way – namely, through the emergence of

³⁶ Fronto, *Ep.* 2.7.2.

³⁷ Cf. Sen. *Ep.* 47.18; *Dial.* 5.35.1.

³⁸ Plin. *Ep.* 8.16.2.

³⁹ Sen. *Ep.* 47.14. Cf. Sen. *Ep.* 5.35, where indignation at insubordinate slaves, freedmen, wives, and clients is compared ironically to indignation at the loss of political freedom.

the *familia Caesaris*. The next chapter treats in detail the impact of imperial freedmen by weighing literary portrayals (both positive and negative) against epigraphic evidence. For the present moment, I wish simply to highlight the fact that high-ranking *liberti* in the imperial household became emblems of the political system that facilitated their rise to such heights.⁴⁰ The promotion of the emperor's freed advisors to positions of extreme wealth and influence produced disquieting status inversions, particularly under the emperor Claudius.⁴¹ By the same token, the civility of "good" emperors like Augustus or Trajan could be illustrated by their ability to keep slaves and freedmen in check and to dole out rewards and punishments within the appropriate limits.⁴²

The categorical division between slave and free and prevailing biases against *liberti* dissuaded aristocrats from overtly fashioning themselves as the ex-slaves of an imperial patron or emperors from making similar claims. The use of the phrase *adsertor libertatis* and the language of *vindicatio* in political discourse under the principate suggest that such associations may have been studiously avoided – perhaps because they cut too close to the truth of the matter. Yet the tendency to focus on *libertas* rather than on the status of freedmen at moments of political transition would not have prevented members of the elite from consuming models proffered by ex-slaves. Rather, as the cases of Horace, Seneca, and Phaedrus will show, this process required somewhat greater finesse than was needed, for example, to chastise the Senate for embracing its own subjugation. First, however, revisiting the *Cena Trimalchionis* with these questions in mind will help to clarify what aspects of freed culture the imperial aristocracy is likely to have recognized and to have consumed.

Trimalchio's Epigraphic Habit

I suggested in my analysis of Eurysaces' tomb that Petronian satire is a fairly reliable indicator of what aristocrats in the first century CE knew about freed slaves' commemorative culture. My focus there was the capacity of freed commemorators to establish continuity between the servile past and free present, a strategy which characterizes Trimalchio's mural and autobiographical speech. Returning to this episode, I discuss here in more depth how Petronius represents freedmen's epigraphic habit. Trimalchio

⁴⁰ See especially Tac. *Ger.* 25.3; Mouritsen (2011a: 93–109); further discussion below, in Chapter 4.

⁴¹ Roller (2001: 264–272).

⁴² E.g. Plin. *Panegyricus* 88.1–3; *Ep.* 6.31.9; Suet. *Aug.* 67.

epitomizes the literary *topos* of the excessively rich and presumptuous former slave. His house contains an overabundance of epigraphic writing, and the tomb he designs for himself exemplifies his *nouveau riche* outlook. Yet Trimalchio also uses strategies that are attested in extant monuments commissioned by Roman freedmen. In this respect, his character presents a composite of historical practices, elite assumptions, and Petronius' own contributions.

Interpreted along these lines, the *Cena* provides a suitable test case for how Roman aristocrats consumed freed culture by way of literary representations. Tacitus' obituary of a Petronius who served as Nero's "arbiter of elegance" has been taken, together with references to Neronian figures and themes within the novel, as evidence that the work was composed by a senator in the reign of that emperor.⁴³ The work's primary audience would almost certainly have been members of the elite – educated readers (or listeners) who were sufficiently steeped in literature from Homer to Lucan to comprehend the novel's witty allusions and parodies.⁴⁴ On these grounds, it is fairly safe to assume that the *Satyrical* was written "by and for the elite," inasmuch as any literary text would have been. Although Petronius, by virtue of his position and audience, is unable to convey objective historical facts about ex-slaves' hidden transcripts, his satire can nevertheless illuminate ways in which aristocrats engaged freed culture on the basis of their own preconceptions.

A number of challenges face historians who read the *Cena* for information about the social and economic conditions of imperial Italy.⁴⁵ In particular, Trimalchio has been at the center of an extensive debate over class, status, and the Roman economy.⁴⁶ In the novel, as I have already mentioned, Trimalchio informs his guests that he inherited a massive legacy from his patron and used it to enter the shipping trade.⁴⁷ His success in that field eventually allowed him to invest in agriculture and to adopt the lifestyle of a landed aristocrat. Rostovtzeff argued that Trimalchio's experience reflects the existence of a bourgeoisie, whereas Veyne countered that idea by emphasizing how status imposed a glass ceiling on freedmen, no matter how wealthy they became. Most important for my purposes is Veyne's insight that much of the *Satyrical*'s historical value stems from its depiction of social boundaries, which set important limits on freedmen's mobility.

⁴³ Tac. *Ann.* 16.17–20; Rose (1971). On the debate about the novel's date, see Schmeling (2011: xiii–xvii).

⁴⁴ Prag and Repath (2009: 10); cf. Slater (1990: 1–23); Jansson (2004: 235–236).

⁴⁵ For a summary of the issues, see Andreau (2009).

⁴⁶ See especially Rostovtzeff (1957: 57–59); Veyne (1961); D'Arms (1981); Verboven (2007).

⁴⁷ Petron. *Sat.* 75.7–77.7.

Petronius' treatment of freed culture poses equally difficult problems, especially when students of Roman history and material culture use the text as an interpretive lens for surviving monuments and other artifacts. To quote Petersen's incisive response to this phenomenon, which she aptly calls "Trimalchio Vision":⁴⁸

When historians talk about Trimalchio as if he were a historical individual rather than a literary construct, they risk perpetuating ancient elite, pejorative attitudes about ex-slaves, rather than getting closer to revealing the multifaceted and diverse intentions of historical ex-slaves.

In acknowledgment of this critique, I have avoided using Petronius as a definitive guide to the epigraphic evidence without first evaluating that evidence on its own terms. However, parallels between the *Cena* and the material record may still be significant, not because they prove that Roman Italy was full of men like Trimalchio, but because they indicate which aspects of freed culture were known to Petronius and his readers. These details contribute to the episode's "reality effect" by integrating practices that members of the elite would have associated with ex-slaves, although such features of the narrative do not provide any reliable indicators of actual freedmen's mentalities, subjective experiences, or intentions.⁴⁹

In a climactic scene, Trimalchio has the contents of his will read aloud and describes the plan of his future tomb to Habbinas, a fellow freedman and *lapidarius*.⁵⁰ The plot must be appropriately large, measuring one hundred by two hundred feet; a dizzying array of sculptural elements will celebrate Trimalchio's wealth and prestige and, in doing so, will provide him with a life after death (*post mortem vivere*).⁵¹ A number of the figures and formulae that Trimalchio imagines for his tomb correlate with practices known from the material record.⁵² These include standard formulae like "this monument shall not descend to my heir," as well as motifs tailored to individuals who participated in the shipping business, became local benefactors, or became

⁴⁸ Petersen (2006: 6–10, 84–87), quotation from p. 10. Petersen (2006: 86) also recalls the argument that Petronius uses wealthy freedmen to satirize the Neronian court or to critique Roman society more broadly. While I am sympathetic to these views, I limit my discussion to what the *Satyricon* can reveal about aristocratic approaches to ex-slaves, whether interpreted as a direct commentary on this social group or as a means of issuing broader statements about power and luxury in Nero's Rome.

⁴⁹ Andreau (2009: 114–115); Mayer i Olivé (2012). On the *Cena*'s relationship to elite anxieties about social hierarchy under the empire, see especially Ramsby (2012).

⁵⁰ See Schmeling (2011: *ad loc.*); Nelis-Clément and Nelis (2005: 14, with n. 35).

⁵¹ Petron. *Sat.* 71; the reference to the afterlife is found at 71.6.

⁵² For a balanced discussion of the problem, see Hope (2009a); Leach (2006: 3–4); cf. Whitehead (1993).

an **Augustalis*.⁵³ Trimalchio also composes an epitaph that will enumerate his achievements and virtues.⁵⁴ Along with that inscription, he requests that a sundial be placed in the center of the complex “so that anyone who checks the time will read my name, whether he wants to or not.”⁵⁵

Interpreting correlations between Trimalchio’s imaginary tomb and surviving monuments necessitates taking a broader view of Petronius’ approach to the epigraphic habit.⁵⁶ The scene in which Trimalchio designs his burial represents the culmination of an epigraphic motif that characterizes the entire *Cena*. When Encolpius first arrives at the house, before seeing his host’s biographical mural, he spots a sign fastened to the doorpost that warns slaves not to leave without their master’s permission, lest they be punished with 100 lashes.⁵⁷ Nearby is a painting of a dog with block-letters spelling out “Beware of the dog!” (*Cave canem!*).⁵⁸ The mural itself has been labeled with captions that explain how Trimalchio rose from slavery to his current position.⁵⁹ Once inside, Encolpius notices that the doorway to the dining room is adorned with rods and axes, as well as a ship’s beak bearing the inscription, “To C. Pompeius Trimalchio, *sevir Augustalis*, from his steward, Cinnamus.”⁶⁰ Below this dedication, an engraved placard reminds the household staff on which days their master dines out.⁶¹

Epigraphic writing is not limited to architectural settings, but rather permeates Trimalchio’s world. During the banquet, Encolpius notes that some of the appetizer plates have been engraved with Trimalchio’s name and their weight in silver.⁶² Labels attached to the wine jars verify that the host is serving only the finest Falernian, aged for 100 years (and therefore beyond the point of being drinkable on its own).⁶³ These texts join Trimalchio’s tomb and epitaph in asserting his prestige as a free man,

⁵³ E.g. Petron. *Sat.* 71.8 (*hoc monumentum heredem non sequatur*); 71.6 (*in fronte ... in agrum*). For imagery of shipping and local euergetism, see Petron. *Sat.* 71.9–10. Comparisons are often drawn with the tombs of Gaius Munatius Faustus (Pompeii, Herculaneum Gate necropolis, 22S, 60–70 CE; *CIL* 10.1030 = *ILS* 6373); C. Lusius Storax (Teate, c. 40 CE; *Suppl. It.* 1983, 121); Anteros Asiaticus (Brixia, first century CE; *CIL* 10.4482).

⁵⁴ Petron. *Sat.* 71.12.

⁵⁵ Petron. *Sat.* 71.11.

⁵⁶ Nelis-Clément and Nelis (2005).

⁵⁷ Petron. *Sat.* 28.7.

⁵⁸ Petron. *Sat.* 29.1.

⁵⁹ Petron. *Sat.* 29.3–4.

⁶⁰ Petron. *Sat.* 30.2.

⁶¹ Petron. *Sat.* 30.3–4.

⁶² Petron. *Sat.* 31.10.

⁶³ Petron. *Sat.* 34.6–7; cf. the comments of Plin. *HN* 14.6.55. See Smith (1975: *ad loc.*); Nelis-Clément and Nelis (2005: 13).

Roman citizen, slave-owner, political actor, and possessor of substantial wealth.⁶⁴ At the same time, Trimalchio's penchant for inscriptions typifies the foreign cultural milieu in which Encolpius finds himself trapped.⁶⁵ Petronius emphasizes the separateness of freed culture by amplifying its most distinctive feature, which he distorts according to stereotypes about ex-slaves' outsized ambitions.

One insightful reading of the *Cena* has posed the question of whether "we should not be more aware of the knowing strategies of a Trimalchio who has certainly a sophisticated grasp of the possibilities offered his class by the rise of the epigraphic habit."⁶⁶ If this challenge is taken to heart, the complexity of Petronius' engagement of freed culture in turn becomes more apparent. The commemorative strategies which the satirist appropriates for the benefit of his elite readers are not limited to formulae and ostentatious displays of wealth. Rather, as I argued in the case of Eurysaces, Petronius parodies ex-slaves' willingness to acknowledge their servile backgrounds. Elsewhere in the *Cena*, Trimalchio and his fellow *liberti* trade stories about their slave days. "When I was still a slave ..." begins Niceros' tale about the werewolf; "when I still had [a slave's] hair ..." counters his host.⁶⁷ The endurance of relationships from slavery to freedom is also subject to exploitation. Trimalchio's will provides not just for his slaves' liberation but also, in the case of a certain Philargyrus, for a grant of property and that man's slave wife (*contubernalis*).⁶⁸ Hermeros asserts that "I paid for the freedom of my *contubernalis*, lest anyone put a hand on her."⁶⁹ For Petronius and his aristocratic audience, such gestures toward continuity in the life course become fodder for satire.

Ironically, the epitaph that Trimalchio dictates to Habbinas refers not just to wealth and civic activities but also to servile virtues:⁷⁰

C. Pompeius Trimalchio Maecenatianus hic requiescit. Huic seviratus absenti decretus est. Cum posset in omnibus decuriis Romae esse, tamen noluit. Pius, fortis, fidelis, ex parvo crevit; sestertium reliquit trecenties, nec umquam philosophum audivit. Vale: et tu.

Here lies C. Pompeius Trimalchio Maecenatianus, to whom the office of the sevirate was granted *in absentia*. Although he could have been in all

⁶⁴ Nelis-Clément and Nelis (2005: 5–16).

⁶⁵ On the social separation of Trimalchio's dinner, articulated in terms of death, burial, and the underworld, see especially Bodel (1994).

⁶⁶ Nelis-Clément and Nelis (2005: 15–16); see also Beard (1997: 94) on Petron. *Sat.* 71.12.

⁶⁷ Petron. *Sat.* 61.6, 63.3; cf. 44.4.

⁶⁸ Petron. *Sat.* 71.2.

⁶⁹ Petron. *Sat.* 57.6.

⁷⁰ Petron. *Sat.* 71.12.

divisions of the public service at Rome, he did not wish to. Dutiful, brave, and loyal, he grew from little means and left behind 30 million sesterces. Nor did he ever listen to a philosopher. Farewell! And you, too.

Trimalchio's desire to inscribe precisely how much money he left evokes the stereotype of the overweening *libertus*. So, too, does the presumptuousness of his refusal to be enrolled in *decuriae*. The personal qualities that Trimalchio lists – *pietas*, *fortitudo*, and *fides* – mirror the titles of three Roman legions, perhaps to mock his exclusion from military service.⁷¹ At the same time, this portion of the epitaph parodies ex-slaves' employment of such concepts to strengthen their personae in death. The phrase *ex parvo crevit* performs a similar function by introducing a rags-to-riches motif, rather than a claim to respectable poverty.

In these ways, Petronius represents strategies employed by ex-slaves for the benefit of his readers. Such correlations are useful not because they illuminate the subjective motivations of *liberti* but because they suggest that members of the elite were aware that certain patterns existed. To understand why Trimalchio's epigraphic habit is funny, readers would have needed to recognize the strategies he uses and to associate them with freed slaves. By exploiting a range of historically attested practices – including the creation of links with the servile past and the combination of economic success with claims to morality – Petronius speaks to the elite's knowledge of elements in freed culture other than competitive display. The novel's engagement of the epigraphic landscape of imperial Italy in turn suggests that aristocrats not only circulated stereotypes about wealthy freedmen but also used, for their own rhetorical purposes, the material that *liberti* produced.

Strategies for the Principate

For evidence that freedmen proffered models for aristocratic behavior, as opposed to mere objects of ridicule, one must turn to authors other than Petronius, whose aims are primarily those of a critic. The Romans' capacity to identify with slaves in captivity is well known. "Slaves allowed the free to imagine being otherwise, furnishing them with an imaginative alibi" or "a metaphor and a yardstick for a variety of relationships."⁷² Literary texts often cast servility in a pejorative light, for instance as a

⁷¹ Schmeling (2011: *ad loc.*).

⁷² Fitzgerald (2000: 10, 69).

cipher for the absence of political freedom, as I have already mentioned. But in some genres – most notably, Augustan love elegy – a male narrator assumes the guise of a slave to construct his persona.⁷³ According to one interpretation of this process, the poet manipulates his status only to regain authority via his control over language.⁷⁴ Adopting the position of a “slave to love” provided these authors with a mechanism for examining the broader field of shifting power relations from an erotic perspective.⁷⁵

Horace’s poetry contains strong indications that *liberti* performed a similar function, albeit through less direct channels.⁷⁶ Beginning with the appearance of *Satires* I around 35 BCE, Horace’s oeuvre spans the so-called Second Triumvirate, the war between Octavian and Antony, Octavian’s victory at Actium, and the Augustan settlements.⁷⁷ He probably wrote, as his final work, *Ars Poetica* in the years preceding his death in 8 BCE. During these transformative decades, the traditional system of elite competition reached a violent crescendo and reconstituted itself around the figure of the *princeps*. Horace witnessed these changes firsthand, originally as a partisan of the republican cause, then as a member of Maecenas’ circle and, through Maecenas, a friend of Augustus. His poems contributed actively to the ideological developments that characterize the fall of the republic and early phases of the principate.⁷⁸

Although *Satires* I was published several years before Actium and makes only one explicit reference to Octavian, the collection has been shown to reflect the uncertainty and brutality of its time, which already called for a new approach to *libertas*.⁷⁹ Horace’s redefinition of *libertas* stands in contrast to the concept of license, which represents an unrestrained but ultimately destructive freedom associated with republican politics.⁸⁰ A better solution for the present climate, and eventually for monarchical

⁷³ Wyke (2002); McCarthy (1998); Veyne (1988: esp. 132–150); cf. Kennedy (1993). On the origins and development of the *servitium amoris* metaphor, see Lyne (1979); Copley (1947).

⁷⁴ McCarthy (1998).

⁷⁵ E.g. Fitzgerald (2000: 71–77); Wyke (2002: 31–45), with the salutary observation that “it is through the relation of elegiac narratives to all other cultural discourses of the specific period in which they were produced that we can at last see a more secure fit between women in elegiac texts and women in Augustan society” (p. 32).

⁷⁶ This section draws on studies that address different aspects of Horace’s representation of freedmen and freed culture, especially Oliensis (1998), Marchesi (2005), and McCarter (2015). I have also relied on the commentary of Gowers (2001).

⁷⁷ Lowrie (2007).

⁷⁸ E.g. Kennedy (1992); Santirocco (1995).

⁷⁹ Hor. *Sat.* 1.3.4; see Du Quesnay (1984); cf. Freudenburg (2001: 44–51). On *libertas* in Horace, see also Kennedy (1992); Ruffell (2003); Roman (2014: 93–113); McCarter (2015).

⁸⁰ Du Quesnay (1984: 30).

rule, was a moderate *libertas* determined according to Horace's "golden mean." That is to say, ingratiating oneself to extremely powerful men could be effective, even virtuous, as long as one preserved the proper balance between obedience and autonomy. This freedom, as one critic has argued with respect to *Epistles* 1, published in 20 BCE, "enables one to stand between the extremes of either *mera libertas* [unmitigated freedom] or *obsequium plus aequo* [ignoble deference]." ⁸¹

According to this interpretation, Horace of *Epistles* 1 seems to promote a version of *libertas* roughly comparable to that of ex-slaves; "the moderate freedom formulated in [that work] is embodied by the figure of the freedman."⁸² The question follows to what extent Horace's treatment of the *libertus* as a potential model for thinking about political freedom constitutes an engagement of freed culture, as opposed to a literary trope or fiction that operates more or less independently of freedmen's cultural practices. Horace's poetry seems best to fit the former description when he expounds on his descent from an ex-slave.⁸³ In *Satires* 1.4, the poet attributes his moralizing approach to his father, who "encouraged me to live with thrift and frugality and to be content with what he had personally provided for me."⁸⁴ In *Satires* 1.6, he goes into more detail about his background. He opens by praising Maecenas for not withholding friendship on the basis of humble birth. This statement prompts Horace to emphasize personal favor and private virtues, rather than the approval of the mob, which is "foolishly enslaved to renown" and "gapes in admiration of titles and ancestral busts."⁸⁵ Even sons of freedmen might find their way into high company if they excel on moral and intellectual grounds.

Horace's freedman father provides him with an ethical guide. "If (to give myself praise) I live my life with integrity and free from guilt, and have the love of friends, this is all due to my father (*causa fuit pater his*)."⁸⁶ Although the elder Horatius must have been rich, *Satires* 1.6 balances the stereotype of the *nouveau riche* freedman against the image of an honest and moderate one. With his father at his side to ward off corruption, Horace received the same training as did sons of senators and *equites*, nor was his status

⁸¹ McCarter (2015: 12).

⁸² McCarter (2015: 12–15), quotation from p. 15. I do not join McCarter in following Patterson's (1991: 258–263) interpretation of Augustus' claim to have liberated the state from a faction as evidence that the principate was modeled by its founder on the patron–freedman relationship. Still, as I noted above, this would not have prevented individuals from using such a model to understand and respond to autocracy in the way that McCarter sees Horace doing in *Epistles* 1.

⁸³ Hor. *Sat.* 1.4 and 1.6; *Ep.* 1.20; cf. *Od.* 3.6.

⁸⁴ Hor. *Sat.* 1.4.107–108 (trans. Davie, as throughout).

⁸⁵ Hor. *Sat.* 1.6.15–17; cf. 1.6.64.

⁸⁶ Hor. *Sat.* 1.6.69–71.

apparent to outside observers.⁸⁷ Yet Horace is careful to refute the idea that his father's choices were driven by greed. It would have been no disgrace, he claims, if he had pursued a career in the banking business rather than advancing to equestrian rank.⁸⁸ Nor would he wish for noble parents, since his upbringing trained him to appreciate the simple life, free of "wretched and oppressive ambition."⁸⁹

Horace presents himself as the son of a freedman for rhetorical reasons, to deflect the charge of unreserved social-climbing and to establish moral grounds for his advancement.⁹⁰ His life story falls in the tradition of Greek intellectuals who professed to be wiser than others on account of their humble origins.⁹¹ It has even been suggested that Horace's father was not a freedman at all, but rather that he belonged to an elite family from Venusia, fought for the Italian side during the Social War, and may have been sold into slavery or manumitted *pro forma* as a result of that conflict.⁹² The most serious challenge to this argument is that Romans did not distinguish between people who became *liberti* under the proposed scenario and those who arrived at the same status through other channels, such as enslavement by birth or exposure followed eventually by manumission.⁹³ In addition, the lifestyle that Horace ascribes to his father was within the reach of ex-slaves in late republican Italy, and there is therefore little basis on which to question the historical validity of Horace's self-professed background.⁹⁴

Still, the poet's depiction of his father cannot simply be accepted at face value. Rather, Horace uses his connection to the *ordo libertinus* to shape his ethical persona. In the *sphragis* to *Epistles* 1, he sends off his book, construed as a promiscuous slave, with the warning that it will find its way eventually into the hands of provincial schoolboys.⁹⁵ Thinking about the book's final days prompts Horace to return to his own biography, fashioned to resemble an epitaph:⁹⁶

Cum tibi sol tepidus pluris admoverit auris,
me libertino natum patre et in tenui re

⁸⁷ On this line, see Gowers (2001: *ad loc.*).

⁸⁸ Hor. *Sat.* 1.6.85–87.

⁸⁹ Hor. *Sat.* 1.6.128–129.

⁹⁰ Oliensis (1998: 34).

⁹¹ Moles (2007).

⁹² Williams (1995).

⁹³ As noted by Mouritsen (2011a: 266–267).

⁹⁴ Treggiari (1969: 108–109).

⁹⁵ On this poem, see especially Harrison (1988); Oliensis (1995); cf. Ov. *Tr.* 1; Hinds (1985).

⁹⁶ Hor. *Ep.* 1.20.19–22.

maiores pinnas nido extendisse loqueris,
ut, quantum generi demas, virtutibus addas ...

When the cooler sun has brought you a bigger audience, you will say that I am the son of a freedman and in meager circumstances spread my wings beyond my nest, so that you add to my virtues what you subtract from my birth.

Compared to *Odes* 2.20 and 3.30, which celebrate the poet's triumph over mortality, the modest inscription of *Epistles* 1.20 both extends Horace's memory for the indefinite future and undermines those lofty pretensions.⁹⁷ It is striking that, in this commemorative setting, Horace combines his descent from a freedman and his avowedly humble upbringing with claims to virtue, success, and (via poetry itself) mastery of his chosen art.

In addition to presenting his father as a model of virtue, Horace integrates the conventionally servile genre of animal fable into *Satires* and *Epistles* for rhetorical reasons. It has been shown that the poet refers indirectly to fable in *Satires* 1 and places these allusions in the mouths of other characters in *Satires* 2; only in *Epistles* does he fully embrace the form, a development which may reflect "growing confidence in his position as a self-appointed moralist poet."⁹⁸ Most of the fables that Horace evokes promote moderate behavior and adherence to social boundaries, two strategies which were central to slave and freed culture, albeit in combination with others. In *Satires* 2.3, for example, the fox and lion exemplify the dangers of spending money to win offices and honors, and the horse and stag at *Epistles* 1.10 convey a similar ethical point.⁹⁹ The benefits of the simple life are illustrated not only by the city and country mouse in *Satires* 2.6 but also by the overfed fox in *Epistles* 1.7, where fable warns against exchanging "freest leisure" (*otium liberrimum*) for material gain.¹⁰⁰

Horace claims to be proud of his freedman father and integrates a servile genre into his poetry, but in other settings he makes disdainful references to overly ambitious *liberti*; this apparent conflict in his social outlook has caused a certain amount of consternation among modern critics.¹⁰¹ *Epodes* 4 ruthlessly pillories a rich ex-slave whose sides are scarred by the whip and legs worn by fetters, but who revels in his great fortune nonetheless. However, such discrepancies do not necessarily imply that Horace held

⁹⁷ Harrison (1988); Oliensis (1995: 221–224). On the epitaphic quality of this passage, see Ferri (1993: 131–137); McCarter (2015: 272).

⁹⁸ Marchesi (2005: 310–322), quotation from p. 322.

⁹⁹ Hor. *Sat.* 2.3.186 and *Ep.* 1.10.34–43; cf. also *Sat.* 1.6.22 (*in propria non pelle quiessem*).

¹⁰⁰ Hor. *Ep.* 1.7.36; McCarter (2015: 132–133).

¹⁰¹ See Mouritsen (2011a: 267–268) for a balanced discussion.

conflicting views about freedmen, since his morally upstanding father and the immoderate *libertus* of *Epodes* 4 simply inhabit different points on the same ideological spectrum. Horace's own free birth undeniably distinguished him in fundamental respects from his freedman parent, but the poet capitalizes on that relationship to craft his evolving persona. Through this process of appropriation, Horace draws on particular aspects of freed culture, as well as on common stereotypes, to articulate a pragmatic approach to *libertas* for an increasingly autocratic world.

Think Like a Freedman

The younger Seneca's treatment of former slaves suggests that identifying with *liberti* remained fruitful for aristocrats under the Julio-Claudians. The Stoic principle that virtue can be achieved regardless of one's social status heavily informs Seneca's use of slaves and *liberti* as metaphors and ethical touchstones. To cite one example, from *De Beneficiis*:¹⁰²

Nulli praeclusa uirtus est; omnibus patet, omnes admittit, omnes invitat, et ingenuos et libertinos et servos et reges et exules; non eligit domum nec censum, nudo homine contenta est.

Virtue is shut off to no one. It lies open to all, admits all, invites all – freeborn, freedmen, slaves, kings, exiles; it chooses neither household nor census but is satisfied with the bare human.

The fact that masters wield ultimate authority over slaves generates a particular quandary, because slaves can be said to render services (*ministeria*), but not benefits (*beneficia*) of their own free will. Seneca proffers the concept of universal virtue as one solution to this problem. The location of authority, he reasons, matters less than the capacity of all human beings to do good. If slaves cannot bestow benefits on their masters, then subjects cannot do so for kings, or soldiers for generals. “What does it matter by what sort of command (*imperium*) a person is held, if it belongs to the highest order?”

Seneca's comparison of slaves, royal subjects, and soldiers best exemplifies his immediate point, namely that being constrained by another person's authority does not destroy the potential for virtuous actions. The Stoic axiom that “only the wise man is free,” which likely had roots in the Hellenistic tradition, sets up a correspondence between

¹⁰² Sen. *Ben.* 3.18.2.

dishonor and captivity, on the one hand, and honor and freedom, on the other.¹⁰³ Unfortunately, the damaged state of the evidence for early Stoicism has prevented a detailed account of the long-term development of these *topoi*.¹⁰⁴ However, in the context of imperial Rome, it is significant that Seneca employs these metaphors to encourage his readers to identify with slaves and other low-status groups, if only in a purely theoretical sense. To cite one compelling interpretation of this pattern, “the Stoic senator can imagine himself as the metaphorical slave who must be freed from his attachments, his passions. At the same time, he is invited to identify with the actual slave who, whatever humiliations he must endure at the hands of his slavish master, remains in his mind free.”¹⁰⁵ Although these models ultimately reinforce social norms, they reflect the elite’s practice of adopting the stance of enslaved persons to serve their rhetorical goals.

In the passage just cited from *De Beneficiis*, Seneca includes freedmen in a list of statuses designed to encompass the world at large, from slaves in captivity to exiles. However, freedmen’s relevance to his argument becomes more apparent later in the discussion. Having recited a series of *exempla* in which slaves confer benefits on their masters, Seneca returns to the Stoic idea of humanity’s common origin. He warns against giving credence to aristocrats who display ancestral busts and stemmata in their homes, since “heaven is the parent of us all.”¹⁰⁶ The display of *imagines* symbolizes a tradition of elite competition based on birth and political office, in response to which Seneca advances virtue as the only legitimate measure of success. “Whether there are freedmen before you [in your family], or slaves, or members of foreign nations, boldly muster your spirit and leap over whatever baseness lies in the middle; great nobility awaits you at the top.”¹⁰⁷ Addressing *liberti* and their descendants allows Seneca to counter his contemporaries’ perceived obsession with ancestry.

Likewise, in the *Letters*, Seneca activates the comparison between aristocratic lineages and the obscure origins of former slaves. Even an atrium full of ancestral masks cannot make a person noble in spirit or render him ethically free.¹⁰⁸ Instead, Seneca advises Lucilius to think of

¹⁰³ Garnsey (1996: 142–145); Manning (1989: 1520–1521).

¹⁰⁴ Garnsey (1996: 129).

¹⁰⁵ Edwards (2009: 159); cf. Joshel (2011: 234).

¹⁰⁶ Sen. *Ben.* 3.28.2.

¹⁰⁷ Sen. *Ben.* 3.28.3.

¹⁰⁸ Sen. *Ep.* 44.5: *Non facit nobilem atrium plenum fumosis imaginibus*; cf. Juv. *Sat.* 8.19–20.

himself as a freedman, so as better to appreciate the distinction between external and internal *libertas*.¹⁰⁹

Put a itaque te non equitem Romanum esse, sed libertinum; potes hoc consequi, ut solus sis liber inter ingenuos. “Quomodo?” inquis. Si mala bonaque non populo auctore distinxeris.

Thus suppose that you are not a Roman *eques*, but a former slave; you can attain this end, namely that you alone are free among the freeborn. “How?” you ask. If you differentiate bad and good things without relying on public opinion.

Seneca asks his addressee and, by extension, his wider audience to engage *liberti* constructively, just as he asks them to do for slaves. In this context, freedmen provide an especially apt point of reference for the elite’s focus on offices and other worldly achievements, whereas metaphorical slavery is best suited to studying extreme differentials of power.

Both senators and equestrians would have been familiar with the strategy of identifying with low-status groups to examine the dynamics of their own social and political environment. Seneca’s message may have held particular resonance for those who had recently ascended through the ranks of the imperial aristocracy. Lucilius, who was serving as *procurator* in Sicily during the composition of the *Letters*, had achieved the rank of *eques*, a promotion which typically required 400,000 HS and a family history of ingenuous birth for at least three generations.¹¹⁰ In some cases, an official grant from the emperor also had to be sought under subjection to personal scrutiny.¹¹¹ Seneca chides Lucilius for professing to be “insignificant” (*pusillus*) when he possesses an inherent capacity to achieve the highest degree of human happiness. “You are a Roman *eques*, and your diligence (*industria*) brought you to this order ... but a good mind lies open to all, and according to this standard we are all noble.”¹¹² As Seneca opines in another letter, statuses are “mere titles, born of ambition.”¹¹³ Like the ideal freedman, Lucilius must accept his external circumstances and strive instead for Stoic virtue.

¹⁰⁹ Sen. *Ep.* 44.6.

¹¹⁰ Plin. *HN* 33.8.32. For general studies of the equestrian order in the principate, in addition to the work of Pflaum, see especially Rowe (2002: 67–84); Nicolet (1966); Demougín (1988). Cf. Davenport (2012) for conditions in the third century CE.

¹¹¹ Duncan-Jones (2016: 93–97); cf. Millar (1992: 279–284).

¹¹² Sen. *Ep.* 44.1–2.

¹¹³ Sen. *Ep.* 31.11. Slaves are included in the triad of statuses that Seneca adduces here, but the “mere title” of *servus* is said to be born not from *ambitio* but from *inuria*.

I argued in the [previous chapter](#) that freedmen's ability to accumulate wealth and to attain a certain degree of social mobility distinguished their role as *exempla* from that of slaves, despite significant overlap between the two. *Letter 44* also suggests that the *ordo libertinus* may have lent itself to analogy with elite *ordines* more readily than did the slave population.¹¹⁴ By the late republic, freedmen constituted a class “distinguished by certain handicaps,” whereas the senatorial and equestrian orders cohered around political privileges.¹¹⁵ In *De Legibus*, Cicero criticizes the luxurious villa of Lucullus, who justified his indulgence by arguing that he could not be outdone by his neighbors, one a freedman and the other an *eques*.¹¹⁶ In this senator's view, “what was granted to persons of lower rank (*inferior ordo*) ought to be conceded to him.”¹¹⁷ Other authors refer more neutrally to the *ordo libertinus*. Livy uses the term to describe levies of rowers, while Suetonius recounts the biography of a grammarian “from the freedman order.”¹¹⁸ Asking someone of equestrian rank to imagine himself as a freedman fit logically into this structure.

Seneca is concerned primarily with the tendency of Roman aristocrats to measure personal worth according to externals. He argues, along trenchantly Stoic lines, that the deeds of one's forefathers have no bearing on virtue.¹¹⁹ In this context, identifying with *liberti* would be especially productive because (in theory) ex-slaves lacked an ancestral heritage apart from that of their patron. Enslavement created “genealogical isolates” whose claims to ancestry and living kin were systematically denied by the ideology of slave-owning. Upon manumission, slaves were symbolically reborn into freedom and absorbed into the clan of their patron.¹²⁰ For the Stoic thinker, freedmen best represented a social class in which virtues speak for themselves.

As is true for Horace, Seneca's willingness to use *liberti* as a philosophical model did not relieve him of social prejudices. To the contrary, the figure of the wealthy freedman appears throughout his philosophical corpus.

¹¹⁴ See Treggiari (1969: 162–168). The term *ordo libertinus* appears at Livy 42.27.3, 43.12.9; Suet. *Gram et Rhet.* 18; Gell. *NA* 5.19.12. Freedmen are referred to in discussions of *ordines* at Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.124, 2.1.127, *Leg.* 3.30; Livy 45.44.19–20; Suet. *Aug.* 74.1; Tac. *Ann.* 13.27. This is not to say that slaves were never perceived as an *ordo*. Cf. *Dig.* 7.1.15.2 on the “*ordo* and *dignitas*” of slaves; *Dig.* 1.5.15.pr., cf. 25.4.1.13; Suet. *Iul.* 27.1.8–9 (where both slaves and freedmen are included among persons *ex reliquo ... ordinum genere*).

¹¹⁵ Treggiari (1969: 162, n. 2).

¹¹⁶ Cic. *Leg.* 3.13.30–31.

¹¹⁷ Cic. *Leg.* 3.13.30.

¹¹⁸ Livy 43.12.9; Suet. *Gram. et Rhet.* 18.

¹¹⁹ Sen. *Ep.* 44.5.

¹²⁰ Patterson (1982: esp. 5, 211, 293); Mouritsen (2011a: 12–14).

In some cases, Seneca merely treats *liberti* in passing as an inferior social group.¹²¹ In others, he draws extensively on negative stereotypes. *Letter* 86, for example, denounces contemporary bathing establishments for luxury and ostentation and identifies ex-slaves as the most egregious offenders.¹²² Similarly, in *De Tranquillitate Animi*, Pompey's freedman Demetrius exemplifies the problem of defining happiness on the basis of wealth. Once a slave with no property at all, Demetrius insisted that the number of chattels in his household be reported to him daily "as if he were the commander of an army."¹²³ In contrast to Diogenes, who declined to retaliate when his only slave ran away, Demetrius embodies for Seneca the misguided principle that fortune leads to happiness.

Stoicism's emphasis on the common origins of humankind is distinctive. Nevertheless, authors working in this tradition reaffirm the social order by arguing that status is an indifferent, with no bearing on ethical freedom.¹²⁴ Rather than question these hierarchies, Seneca uses them to make philosophical arguments in line with Stoic principles, which established a concept of Nature that assigned roles and responsibilities to all individuals, from slaves to the most lofty aristocrat.¹²⁵ At the same time, Seneca's advice to think like a freedman – not just with or about that status – is significant in the context of imperial Rome for its indication that *liberti* provided "imaginative alibis" for the elite, in a similar way as did slaves. Seneca's Stoic rhetoric had not become so divorced from social realities that he ignored the metaphorical instrument that freedmen provided at this historical moment. Moreover, his treatment of *liberti* also supports the conclusion that the nature of those alibis varied according to the status group that was being exploited. In *De Beneficiis* and select letters, identifying with former slaves enables the practitioner of Stoicism to critique the significance of wealth and lineage to definitions of personal progress.

Learning from Fable

In the middle of the first century CE, probably between 43 and the early 70s, Phaedrus brought Aesopic fable into its own in Latin verse.¹²⁶ The first

¹²¹ Sen. *Clem.* 1.9.10; *Dial.* 5.28.1, 5.35.1.

¹²² Sen. *Ep.* 86.7.

¹²³ Sen. *Tranq.* 8.6–7.

¹²⁴ Garnsey (1996: 150–151); Manning (1989: 1529–1533); Shaw (1985: 42).

¹²⁵ On this aspect of Stoicism, and its implications for the appeal of the philosophy as an ideological system under monarchy, see Shaw (1985).

¹²⁶ Phaedrus is usually dated to the time of Augustus and Tiberius, but I am convinced by the argument for a *terminus post quem* of 43 CE put forth by Champlin (2005: 101–102). The transmitted title of

collection of its kind, Phaedrus' *Fables* rendered a conventionally servile form of expression more accessible to elite Roman readers. From his position as a *libertus Augusti*, who likely addresses other ex-slaves in his prologues, Phaedrus appropriates and interrogates strategies of accommodation, subversion, and even violent resistance. As Henderson argued, the *Fables* contain a "bifocal hermeneutics" that draws on discourses from different levels of society to develop modes of speaking to power.¹²⁷ In this respect, Phaedrus follows in the footsteps of Horace, whom he adopts as a literary predecessor alongside the figure of Aesop.¹²⁸

Fable had long been a part of ancient popular culture, not only among slaves and freedmen.¹²⁹ Already by the fifth century BCE, the form had "passed into the common discursive resources of the culture, available as a mask or alibi for critique, parody, or cunning resistance."¹³⁰ Demetrius of Phaleron compiled a prose anthology of *Aesopia*, most likely as a type of handbook.¹³¹ And, as the case of Horace has already shown, Latin authors sometimes integrated fables into their texts to pursue specific rhetorical goals.¹³² However, Phaedrus entered uncharted waters when he turned animal fable into an autonomous genre of Latin poetry.¹³³ The fact that he did so under the early principate, when free speech became a contentious issue for the Roman elite, is unlikely to have been a coincidence. Rather, Phaedrus' generic innovation was highly appropriate for an age in which aristocrats were still struggling to redefine *libertas* and to negotiate their role in a political system that subjugated their authority to that of the *princeps*.

Perhaps this problem was on Seneca's mind during his exile on the island of Corsica. From there, he wrote his letter of consolation to Polybius, one of Claudius' most powerful freedmen. Seneca urges Polybius to assuage his

the manuscript, *Phaedri Augusti liberti fabularum*, indicates that the author belonged to the *familia Caesaris* but does not specify under which emperor(s) he served, if interpreted in terms of formal nomenclature.

¹²⁷ Henderson (2001: 2).

¹²⁸ On the *Life of Aesop*, see Holzberg (2002: 76–84); Kurke (2011: 16–22).

¹²⁹ See e.g. Hes. *Op.* 202–212.

¹³⁰ Kurke (2011: 11–12).

¹³¹ Holzberg (2002: 11–38).

¹³² A list of the fable's relatively rare occurrence in other genres of Latin literature has been compiled by Holzberg (2002: 32–33).

¹³³ See Sciarrino (2010: 233–238), with discussion of prior literary uses of fable and the novelty of Phaedrus' approach. Even a *terminus post quem* of 43 would put Phaedrus ahead of Babrius, who published a collection of fables in Greek verse at some point between the end of the first and beginning of the third century CE; see Holzberg (2002: 52).

grief at the death of a loved one by burying himself in scholarly pursuits, among which should be a collection of fables. He uses *praeteritio* to deliver his message:¹³⁴

Non audeo te eo usque producere, ut fabellas quoque et Aesopeos logos, intempratum Romanis ingeniis opus, solita tibi venustate connectas.

I dare not induce you to this extent, that you weave together fables and Aesopic tales with your customary charm – a task untried by Roman minds.

Seneca had an ulterior motive for extending his condolences to Polybius, but he also bears witness to the perception that Latin literature was prepared for animal fable to emerge as a genre. In addition, by suggesting that a *libertus* undertake this task, Seneca highlights fable's persistent association with slaves and freedmen.

It has been argued that Phaedrus was not an imperial freedman but an aristocrat masquerading as one.¹³⁵ The manuscript tradition preserves the title *Phaedri Augusti liberti fabularum Aesopiarum*, but all other evidence for the poet's background comes from his self-styled persona.¹³⁶ Phaedrus demonstrates relatively detailed knowledge of Roman juridical language and an intimate familiarity with Horace, two signs that he was educated in both classical literature and Roman law.¹³⁷ These aspects of the *Fables* have been marshaled in support of the theory that "Phaedrus" was a rhetorical mask donned by an elite author. Although the Aesopic tradition could certainly be used in this way, and the relevance of the *Fables* to Roman aristocrats is substantial, free birth was not a prerequisite for either poetic or legal expertise in the early empire.¹³⁸ A freedman on the emperor's staff could quite conceivably have been immersed in both fields.

On these grounds, I read the *Fables* as an example of freed slaves' participation in Roman literary production, with an obvious payoff for elite audiences, but also drawing in meaningful ways on servile culture. The poems exhibit a range of strategies for negotiating relations between the weak and the strong, whether slave and master, rich and poor, or subject and ruler. Although concerns about such hierarchies were widespread,

¹³⁴ Sen. *Ad Polybium* 8.3.

¹³⁵ Champlin (2005).

¹³⁶ On the title, see Sciarrino (2010: 231, n. 2).

¹³⁷ Champlin (2005: 109–117).

¹³⁸ Richlin (2014: 200, n. 26).

Phaedrus draws particular attention to fable's presumed origins among the enslaved:¹³⁹

Nunc, fabularum cur sit inventum genus,
brevi docebo. Servitus obnoxia,
quia quae volebat non audebat dicere,
affectus proprios in fabellas transtulit,
calumniamque fictis elusit iocis.

Now, why the order of fables was invented,
I will briefly explain. Under threat of punishment,
since it dared not say what it wished,
slavery translated personal sentiments into fables
and cheated accusation with made-up jokes.

Fable encodes meaning to protect the speaker from punishment when, as Scott argued, the hidden transcript of a subordinate group migrates onto the public stage.¹⁴⁰ By reaffirming fable's conventional status as a servile mode of expression, Phaedrus invites readers to interpret his poems from the perspective of the oppressed, even if not every parable directly relates to slaves and *liberti*.¹⁴¹

Phaedrus evaluates the risks and benefits of accommodating or subverting the status quo. According to one common thread in Roman popular culture, the weak fare best when they accept their lot and avoid offending the strong.¹⁴² Acceptance usually generates a positive outcome, whereas overweening ambition leads to disaster. This principle appears in many of Phaedrus' poems, including one about a jackdaw who tries to pass himself off as a peacock:¹⁴³

Ne gloriari libeat alienis bonis,
suoque potius habitu vitam degere,
Aesopus nobis hoc exemplum prodidit.

That it be pleasing not to vaunt someone else's goods,
and rather to spend one's life in clothes of one's own,
Aesop has proffered this *exemplum*.

¹³⁹ Phaed. 3.*Prol.*33–37; cf. Oberg (2000: *ad loc.*). My point is not that Phaedrus' fables were exclusively relevant to slaves and freedmen or that his aetiology of the genre is historically accurate, but rather that he draws an explicit and culturally meaningful connection between fable and servile modes of discourse.

¹⁴⁰ Scott (1990: 162–166).

¹⁴¹ See Bradley (1984: App. F).

¹⁴² Morgan (2007: 65–67, 73–74).

¹⁴³ Phaed. 1.3.1–3. While attributed to Aesop, this jackdaw fable may be a composite of several tales; cf. Babrius 72; Chambry 162; Perry 123, 129.

In the narrative portion of the poem, Phaedrus describes how the jackdaw, “swollen with empty pride” (*tumens inani ... superbia*), adorns himself with peacock feathers.¹⁴⁴ Not persuaded, the peacocks strip the “impudent” jackdaw of his costume and send him running back to his own tribe.¹⁴⁵ However, the haughty jackdaw is now rejected by his fellows and bears a mark of disgrace for the rest of his life (*a quo repulsus tristem sustinuit notam*).¹⁴⁶ Phaedrus concludes by having one of the offended jackdaws restate the moral:

“Contentus nostris si fuisses sedibus
et quod Natura dederat voluisses pati,
nec illam expertus esses contumeliam
nec hanc repulsam tua sentiret calamitas.”

“If you had been content with our situation
and had been willing to accept what Nature had given you,
neither would you have experienced that contumely
nor would your downfall feel this rebuff.”

The renegade jackdaw’s overweening ambition warrants his expulsion from the company not only of his superiors, but of his peers.¹⁴⁷ The poem’s *endomythion* advances the concept that everyone benefits from following the rules of decorum.

Comparable statements appear in numerous fables that promote modesty as a strategy for survival.¹⁴⁸ This category of moral advertises the utility of knowing and respecting one’s boundaries, and the strong are likewise encouraged to practice restraint in exercising their authority over inferiors.¹⁴⁹ At the time when Phaedrus was writing, these models applied as much to the political sphere as to interactions between private citizens, since success could quickly turn into failure at the hands of a jealous autocrat. Members of the elite stood to benefit from tactics recommended by Phaedrus for managing power from below, as well as from a position of authority. In this environment, the poet’s status as a freedman and emphasis on fable’s connection to slavery recommends slave and freed culture as a key point of reference.

¹⁴⁴ Phaed. 1.3.4–9.

¹⁴⁵ Phaed. 1.3.9–10.

¹⁴⁶ Phaed. 1.3.11; the political significance of these lines is noted by Bloomer (1997: 82).

¹⁴⁷ Phaed. 1.3.13–16; cf. Phaed. 1.2.4, in which a frog uses her children as judges in an attempt to puff up to the size of a cow. A similar *promythion* is employed (1.2.4.1).

¹⁴⁸ The value of accepting one’s lot in life is articulated e.g. at Phaed. 1.2–4, 1.15, 1.24, 1.27, 1.29, 1.30, 2.7, 3.5, 3.18, 4.4, 4.6, 4.8.

¹⁴⁹ See e.g. Phaed. 1.28, 4.13, 4.14, 4.17; cf. 1.5.

Phaedrus is more ambivalent about whether violent acts of rebellion are worth the risks they entail. When recounting a story about a fox and an eagle, he opens with this *promythion*:¹⁵⁰

Quamvis sublimes debent humiles metuere,
vindicta docili quia patet sollertiae.

However lofty they are, men ought to fear the humble,
since *vindicta* lies open to *docilis* ingenuity.

I have refrained from translating *vindicta* or *docilis* to preserve the double entendre contained in these lines. *Vindicta* can simply mean “retribution,” but it is also the technical term for a formal manumission procedure, as I have discussed above. To continue the ambiguity, *docilis* might be translated as “skillful” in this context, but the word carries the additional nuance of teachability, or even of compliance.¹⁵¹

This double meaning plays out in the rest of the fable. An eagle has snatched a fox’s young as a meal for her chicks; when the fox fails to win her children back by entreaty, she lights a ring of fire around the tree in which the eagle’s nest is perched. Phaedrus points out that the fox takes this action despite the danger to her own family (*hosti dolorem damno miscens sanguinis*).¹⁵² Although the eagle ultimately returns the kits to their mother, the fox has made a dangerous gamble with the lives of her pups. The open-ended manner in which Phaedrus introduces the poem complicates, rather than undermines, the message about power that is being conveyed. It suggests that the weak have different ways in which they might respond to injustice and that selecting the right course of action depends on one’s ability to sift through all possible outcomes.

The *Fables* as a whole can be read productively as evidence for the Roman elite’s reception of slave and freed culture, as filtered through a freedman poet. The tactics that Phaedrus weaves into his poems appropriate an

¹⁵⁰ Phaed. 1.28.1–2.

¹⁵¹ This poem contains the sole occurrence of *docilis* in Phaedrus’ work and one of three instances in which the poet uses the noun *vindicta*. All three occurrences deal with violent reprisal, but with social implications; see Oberg (2000: *ad loc.*). The second *vindicta* appears in Phaed. 1.29, in the mouth of a boar whose dignity is insulted by an ass: “He suppressed his anger and said: ‘Revenge (*vindicta*) is easy for me, but I do not wish to be sullied by lowly blood’” (1.29.10–11). Although the intended meaning of *vindicta* here is obviously “revenge,” the context involves differentiation of status, and the nuance of “manumission” may still be latent. In Phaed. 4.4, a horse who seeks the help of a man to punish a boar becomes subject to the man’s power. The horse says ironically, at 4.4.10–11, “While I, a madman, seek revenge (*vindicta*) for a petty affair, I have met with enslavement (*servitus*).”

¹⁵² Phaed. 1.28.10.

anesthetized, commonly available version of what may once have been a hidden transcript. In doing so, they resonate with forms and values still in operation among slaves and *liberti* in the first century CE. Phaedrus represents a system in which survival often depends on outwardly accepting one's place in the hierarchy and weighing carefully the benefits of reacting violently against one's social superiors. Like Horace, who appeals to his father's status to craft an ethical persona, Phaedrus uses his position as a *libertus* as a point of departure from which to furnish readers (including elite readers) with behavioral models.

Adopting the slave or ex-slave's perspective does not prevent Phaedrus from reproducing familiar biases and stereotypes about members of these status groups. Certain *Fables* paint an equally negative portrait of *liberti* as do the *Satyrice*, Horace's *Epode* 4, and other Latin texts in which freed characters attract social prejudice. In *Fable* 3.10, a greedy and conniving ex-slave tries to secure his patron's estate by tricking his ex-master into killing his son, then himself.¹⁵³ In the aftermath of the murder-suicide, the patron's wife comes to court on specious charges, which Augustus steps in to adjudicate:¹⁵⁴

"Luat" inquit "poenas causa libertus mali ...
quod si delata perscrutatus crimina
paterfamilias esset, si mendacium
subtiliter limasset, a radicibus
non evertisset scelere funesto domum."

He said, "Let the freedman, who caused the evil, pay the price ...
But if the *paterfamilias* had scrutinized
the charges presented to him, if he had
painstakingly investigated the lie, from its very roots
he would not have overturned his house by a fatal crime."

According to the *promythion*, this story is meant to admonish readers that "it is dangerous to believe and not to believe."¹⁵⁵ The *paterfamilias* suffered because he believed his freedman; if it had not been for Augustus, the wife would have suffered because certain people refused to credit her innocence.¹⁵⁶ Phaedrus casts a *libertus* as the source of the lies that initiate death and destruction.

¹⁵³ Phaed. 3.10.9–33.

¹⁵⁴ Phaed. 3.10.44–50.

¹⁵⁵ Phaed. 3.10.1.

¹⁵⁶ For a discussion of how Phaedrus constructs his authorial persona in relation to Augustus' role in this poem and in 2.5, see Libby (2010: 552–557).

The stereotype of the “bad” freedman was so common in Latin literature that Phaedrus’ Roman audience would scarcely have blinked at seeing a *libertus* cast in this role. Nor should modern critics expect Phaedrus to have excised from his writings the predominant biases of his society, despite his probable freedman status and claim to be following in Aesop’s wake.¹⁵⁷ Even if Phaedrus had not been a *libertus* – to return to this point of controversy – his use of slave and freed culture would have affected profoundly his poems’ relevance to and impact on an elite readership. As a literary collection, the *Fables* import a servile mode of discourse into the poetic mainstream to a new degree and with new implications. The appearance of this work in the first century CE marks a critical moment in the Roman aristocracy’s engagement of rhetorical strategies that were strongly associated with the slave and freed population. Members of these groups actively generated models for the negotiation of power, in part through inscribed burial monuments, as I argued in the previous chapters. Phaedrus applies similar tactics in a literary genre that was both rooted in slavery and appealed to members of the upper orders. In this respect, the *Fables* extend beyond the confines of the elite imagination and help to illuminate the ways in which diverse social forces contributed to the cultural developments that distinguish this period.

Conclusion

In political discourse of the empire, metaphors of manumission rarely attend to the condition of being a Roman freedman. Rather, they focus on the transition between the categories of *servus* and *liber* and on the *adsertor libertatis*, a third party who intervenes on behalf of the enslaved. Although Augustus founded the principate on the basis of *auctoritas*, he was careful not to cast himself as the patron of a freed Rome. Styling oneself as *pater patriae* was a more palatable approach than was taking openly the guise of a patron. Nor did political actors who used the metaphor of manumission in the late 60s and early 70s CE assume the mantle of an ex-slave’s *patronus*. Even when it was obvious that Rome had become and would remain a monarchy, symbols of liberation needed to preserve the integrity of the state’s restored freedom.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Phaedrus’ espousal of the idea that one should not judge others on the vagaries of fortune, for example, in the case of the eunuch who replies to an adversary, “But why, fool, do you bring a charge that is the fault of Fortune?” (3.11.6).

Despite this aversion to drawing explicit parallels between emperors and patrons, on the one hand, and subjects and freedmen, on the other, *liberti Augusti* became familiar symbols of autocracy. Moreover, Latin authors borrowed strategies for negotiating power from freedmen, as well as from slaves. Seneca demonstrates the utility of identifying with the *ordo libertinus* to interrogate the value of externals like noble ancestry and political office. Horace builds a similar process of identification into his poetic persona, especially in *Satires* and *Epistles*. He associates the principles of moderation and restraint of ambition with his freedman father, who fit the mold of the “good” *libertus* despite enjoying financial success. Phaedrus, who was probably an ex-slave in the imperial household, followed Horace’s path by composing Aesopic fables in Latin verse.

Aristocrats’ openness to forms generated from below suggests that they consumed freed culture for their own benefit. However, certain strategies that Roman authors associate with servility are attested in the material record, particularly in the area of funerary epigraphy, which was dominated in imperial Italy by former slaves. Although some ex-slaves did erect monuments that celebrate their vast economic resources, even tombs like that of Eurysaces responded creatively to social norms. These points of contact between the literary and epigraphic sources suggest the existence of a dialogue between freed and elite cultures, albeit one conditioned by social inequalities and skewed in favor of the upper orders. By constructing their monumental personae relative to the expectations of masters and patrons, but also by identifying legitimate sources of value, freedmen produced models that the aristocracy could appropriate when adjusting to a monarchichal system.

Imperial Freedmen and Imperial Power

The father of Ti. Claudius Etruscus died in 92 CE after an illustrious career in the *familia Caesaris*, exile under Domitian, and recall by the same emperor. In a consolatory poem dedicated to Etruscus, *Silvae* 3.3, Statius balances the dishonor of slavery with the prestige of having served on the emperor's staff. Taking this point further, he posits that the whole universe exists in a state of subjugation:¹

... nec enim dominos de plebe tulisti,
sed quibus occasus pariter famulantur et ortus.
nec pudor iste tibi: quid enim terrisque poloque
parendi sine lege manet? vice cuncta reguntur
alternisque premunt. Propriis sub regibus omnis
terra; premit felix regum diademata Roma;
hanc ducibus frenare datum; mox crescit in illos
imperium superis ...

Nor indeed did you bear masters drawn from the masses, but men whom East and West equally serve. Nor is that a source of shame for you: for what abides on earth or in the heavens without the law of obedience? All things are ruled and rule in turn. The whole world lies under particular kings; lucky Rome presses the diadems of kings; governance of Rome is granted to her leaders; then divine authority rises over them ...

It has been observed that Statius represents the deceased as a “victim of court society,” a faithful servant who labored at his post only to be shunted out in old age.² At the same time, his portrayal of the deceased's exile as a Campanian vacation papers over this rift to some extent, as does the encomiastic tone of the poem.³ As a literary monument, *Silvae* 3.3 extols the virtues of an imperial freedman at the same time as it nests the

¹ Stat. *Silv.* 3.3.46–53. On the career and exile of the father of Claudius Etruscus (*PIR*² C 860), see Weaver (1965a; 1972: 284–294); Carradice (1979).

² Newlands (2002: 221).

³ *Silv.* 3.3.154–171.

familia Caesaris in a global framework of power relationships, including that between Rome and its leaders.⁴

In a world structured entirely by relationships of domination, as Statius would have it here, the “law of obedience” applied as much to ex-slaves as to senators and *equites*.⁵ (The latter *ordo*, it should be noted, included both Etruscus and his freedman father, who was awarded equestrian rank by Vespasian.⁶) In this respect, the poem speaks directly to the question explored in this chapter – namely, how imperial slaves and *liberti* modeled strategic conduct in the presence of an autocrat for members of the Roman elite.⁷ In part through their own commemorative culture, but also as figures in political discourse, *liberti Augusti* both embodied and reinforced the tenets of monarchy. Despite being lightning rods for indignation about certain “bad” emperors, particularly after a new regime had been founded, members of the *familia Caesaris* proffered *exempla* that aristocrats could apply fruitfully to their own situation.

The custom of using private slaves and freedmen to carry out public business originated in the republic, when provincial governors and other state officials employed their household staff to run the empire.⁸ In spite of the concerns that this practice raised, it continued to thrive in the principate, partly because of simple convenience, but also because the ties of loyalty that linked the emperor to his slaves and *liberti* meant that these personnel could operate in ways that freeborn administrators could not. The prominence of the *familia Caesaris* seems to have reached its height under Claudius, who was notorious for his reliance on servile advisors; between the Flavian period and the reign of Hadrian the top posts were gradually relinquished to *equites*.⁹ However, imperial slaves and *liberti* continued to fill clerical roles into the third century CE and to work as domestics and estate laborers after Diocletian.¹⁰ Although their center of operations was in Rome, the imperial slaves and ex-slaves of the principate performed their duties throughout Italy and the provinces, whether in residence or on special assignment.

⁴ On the monumental qualities of the poem, see Hulls (2011).

⁵ Leppin (1996: 83).

⁶ Weaver (1965a: 150; 1972: 289). On the award of equestrian status to freedmen through grants of the *ius anulorum aureorum*, see Mouritsen (2011a: 107–108).

⁷ On the *familia Caesaris* in general, see the foundational work of Weaver (1972); Boulvert (1970, 1974); cf. Burton (1977); Chantraine (1967); Eder (1980); Winterling (1999); also Schumacher (2001b); Fabre (1992, 1994); Mouritsen (2011a: 93–109).

⁸ Treggiari (1969: 177–192); Millar (1992: 60–71); Leppin (1996: 67–68); Mouritsen (2011a: 93).

⁹ Mouritsen (2011a: 95–98); on Claudius, see Levick (1990: 83).

¹⁰ Harper (2011: 437).

High-ranking members of the *familia Caesaris* were distinguished by legal status from the freeborn elite but could wield influence at court and command sizeable fortunes. A select few, like the father of Claudius Etruscus, received equestrian rank.¹¹ Pliny, Tacitus, and other ancient critics respond to this phenomenon by equating the presence of powerful *liberti* with a loss of political freedom. By contrast, poets like Martial and Statius, as well as Seneca in the *Ad Polybium*, treat select imperial freedmen with politesse, even lavish praise.¹² Rather than interpret these positive depictions through the partisan lens of more hostile authors, I consider both approaches as rhetorical positions designed to achieve specific results. Under Trajan, for instance, the desire to institute a new Golden Age prompted members of the elite to characterize previous rulers as overly reliant on their servile staff. However, in other political contexts, presenting imperial freedmen as *exempla virtutis* conveyed a pragmatic approach to monarchy, as opposed to hollow adulation.

A third rhetorical stance, if it can be framed in those terms, was taken by imperial slaves and *liberti* in their commemorative monuments. Over 4,000 inscriptions that attest these individuals survive from across the empire; they are identifiable mainly through onomastic formulae like *Caes(aris) ser(vus/a)* and *Aug(usti) lib(ertus/a)* or through administrative titles.¹³ This chapter focuses on imperial freedmen, whose status and authority had a concentrated impact on aristocratic thinking about monarchy, but slaves are taken into account when appropriate. Like their peers in private households, members of the *familia Caesaris* commemorated themselves, family members, and colleagues within the boundaries established by conventional formulae. Yet they faced the unique problem of deciding how to represent their connection to the *princeps*, who was at once their personal patron and ruler of the Roman world. By commemorating the benefits of loyal service to the emperor and enacting the principles of monarchy, this privileged subset of the freed population played a role in shaping its own exemplarity.

¹¹ Weaver (1972: 282–284).

¹² See especially Mart. *Ep.* 4.8., 4.45, 4.78, 5.5, 5.6, 5.38, 7.40, 8.39, 8.68, 9.49, 11.1, 12.11; cf. 9.79; Stat. *Silu.* 3.3, 3.4, 5.1; Sullivan (1991: 62–63); Mouritsen (2011a: 63–64).

¹³ Weaver (1972: 17). For Weaver's near-complete collection of the evidence for *Augusti liberti*, edited posthumously by Eck in 2005, see Paul Weaver, Repertorium Familiae Caesarum, <http://alte-geschichte.phil-fak.uni-koeln.de/500.html>.

Marcus Antonius Pallas

I begin by revisiting the case of M. Antonius Pallas, whose monument and receipt of official honors under Claudius so irritated the younger Pliny that he wrote not one but two letters on the subject. This material shows how a powerful freedman might be represented epigraphically as a constructive model for aristocrats, on the one hand, and how later authors might frame his success as an affront to conventional values, on the other. Although it is tempting to interpret Pallas' honors along the lines that Pliny suggests – namely, as a relic of Claudius' reliance on *liberti* and of the Senate's acquiescence to this status inversion – I would argue that Pliny's letters about Pallas reveal alternative approaches to imperial freedmen, both of which are rhetorically driven. The inscriptions that commemorate Pallas' achievements were designed to publicize a model of how to negotiate power under an autocrat. Pliny's appraisal, by contrast, undermines Pallas' status as a positive *exemplum* to highlight the distinction between Claudius' regime and that of Trajan.¹⁴

Little is known of Pallas' early life except that he belonged to Claudius' mother, Antonia, who either freed him while still living and passed patronal rights to her son or performed the manumission *ex testamento*.¹⁵ The claim that Pallas' lineage descended from Arcadian kings was likely a play on his *cognomen* rather than an accurate genealogy, although Hermeros makes a similar assertion in the *Satyrica*, and *ingenui* are known to have sold themselves into slavery for economic reasons.¹⁶ Regardless of Pallas' actual origins, his service under multiple members of the *domus Augusta* calls attention to the importance of that household, beyond the *princeps* himself.¹⁷ Careers of slaves and freedmen that connect members of the imperial family or span successive regimes reflect the dynastic structure of the principate and, later, the institutionalization of the administrative service.¹⁸

Pallas' prominence under Claudius seems to have been overshadowed at first by that of his fellow *liberti*, Callistus and Narcissus; according to Tacitus, he achieved the “extreme influence” (*flagrantissima gratia*) that marked an imperial favorite by 48 CE.¹⁹ Pallas' victory in the debate about

¹⁴ Cf. Leppin's (1996: 89–91) suggestion that the strategies of imperial freedmen evolved over time.

¹⁵ For a thorough discussion of the evidence for Pallas' career, see Oost (1958); *PIR*: A 858.

¹⁶ Petron. *Sat.* 57.4; cf. Plin. *HN* 12.5.12; on self-sale, see Harris (1999: 73); Ramin and Veyne (1981: 488–497); Silver (2011).

¹⁷ The *columbarium* preserving the household of Livia is one of the best-documented examples of slave and freed dependents who belonged to a member of the *domus Augusta*; see Treggiari (1975).

¹⁸ For the continuation of careers despite dynastic changes, see Panciera (2007); Mouritsen (2011a: 93–94).

¹⁹ Tac. *Ann.* 11.29.1; Oost (1958: 116–117).

whom Claudius should marry after Messalina (he advocated for Agrippina the younger) helped him to remain the most influential of the emperor's freed advisors.²⁰ After the accession of Nero, Pallas learned firsthand the dangers of close involvement with the imperial family. He was dismissed from the post of financial secretary (*a rationibus*) in 55 and, having been acquitted of a charge of *maiestas*, spent the rest of his years in retirement.²¹ In this respect, the vagaries of Pallas' later career demonstrate the risks that attended such a high position, particularly because his support for Agrippina explained both his ascent under Claudius and his withdrawal under Nero.

Despite this decline in his fortunes, Pallas for a time enjoyed the greatest prestige and authority available to a former slave. The official accolades that attended his remarkable career were both substantial and highly publicized – much to the chagrin of Tacitus and Pliny.²² Tacitus recounts how in 52 CE Claudius outlined to the Senate a measure known as the *SC Claudianum*, which reduced the status of women who cohabited with slaves to that of *serva* if the master lacked knowledge of the union or to that of *liberta* if he had approved it. In his speech, Claudius gave Pallas credit for the idea. The consul designate, Boreas Soranus, in turn proposed that the Senate award Pallas the praetorian insignia and 15 million sesterces, with a further grant of public thanks being moved by a no less traditional eminence than a Cornelius Scipio.²³ Pallas was said to be “content with the honor” (*contentum honore*), meaning that he would decline the cash prize.²⁴ A bronze plaque advertising the decree was set up in a public place, which is identified as a loricated statue of the Deified Julius, probably in the Forum of Caesar.²⁵

Although it is generally agreed that these events did occur, the extant sources make it difficult to evaluate the original motives of the Senate or to gauge the full range of reactions that the bestowal of such honors may have provoked. Tacitus and Pliny are unstinting in their revulsion toward the Senate's praise of Pallas. Both use the rhetoric of the “bad” freedman in its connection to the *topos* of the “bad” emperor to lament the political conditions that prompted such obsequious behavior on

²⁰ Tac. *Ann.* 12.1.1–3; Oost (1958: 120–123).

²¹ Oost (1958: 133–138); as he points out, the story that Pallas, who died in 62 CE, was poisoned by Nero is in all likelihood a mere rumor.

²² Tac. *Ann.* 12.53; Plin. *Ep.* 7.29, 8.6.2.

²³ Cf. Plin. *HN* 35.58.201.

²⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 12.53.4; cf. Plin. *Ep.* 7.29.2, 8.6.1.

²⁵ Plin. *Ep.* 8.6.13; Corbier (1997).

the part of the senators in Claudius' reign. Tacitus alludes to the irony of Pallas' being lauded for "traditional frugality" (*antiquae parsimoniae*) when he already had an estate of 300 million.²⁶ Pliny issues even stronger criticism in a pair of letters to Montanus, probably composed between 107 and 108 CE and set in conversation with another pair of epistles about the funerary monument of Verginius Rufus.²⁷ The questions of who deserves to be commemorated and in what form are a central concern.

Pliny bases his first letter about Pallas on the premise that he noticed the freedman's monument along the Via Tiburtina. He cites the text of Pallas' epitaph, which reads: "To this man the Senate decreed praetorian insignia on account of his *fides* and *pietas* toward his patrons and 15 million sesterces, although he was content with the honor." For Pliny, the celebration of these accolades on Pallas' tomb confirms that they were "farcical and unfitting" (*mimica et inepta*).²⁸ His indignation had escalated by the time he wrote the second missive, in which he reiterates the inscription's message and describes the results of his research into the Senate's original decree. Characterizing this document as "verbose and fulsome" (*copiosum et effusum*), Pliny evokes the metaphor of political slavery to express the conditions under which a servile Senate might offer such awards to a slave.²⁹

He also raises the question of why the Claudian Senate would have issued such a decree; perhaps it was an expression of wittiness (*urbanitas*), abjection, or desire for advancement. Pliny dismisses all three options, the first as unbecoming to the Senate, the second as unnecessarily extreme, and the last as a sign of madness, "for who is so insane as to want to advance by means of his own and the community's dishonor, in a state where the exercise of the most reputable office is to be able to praise Pallas first in the Senate?"³⁰ With respect to the purpose of the measure, Sherwin-White has argued that "none of [our sources] seem to perceive ... that there was a satirical twist to these wordy resolutions."³¹ However, the grant of honors to Pallas can hardly be reduced to political satire. Like municipal councils who gave *ornamenta* to freedmen, the Claudian Senate performed

²⁶ Cf. Dio Cass. 61.10.3.

²⁷ On dating, see Sherwin-White (1966: 37–39); on Pallas and Verginius Rufus, see especially Leach (2013); Henderson (2002: 33–34); Woolf (1996: 25–27).

²⁸ Plin. *Ep.* 7.29.3.

²⁹ Plin. *Ep.* 8.6.2, 4.

³⁰ Plin. *Ep.* 8.6.3.

³¹ Sherwin-White (1966: 439, 453).

its duties in an official capacity, even if these acts were largely *pro forma*. Pliny's third suggestion is probably closer to the truth than his rhetoric would suggest, because excelling (or even surviving) at court entailed cultivating relationships with the emperor's inner circle, including his slaves and *liberti*.

In addition, Pliny's report of Pallas' monument and the contents of the senatorial record indicate that an imperial freedman might stand as a constructive model for aristocrats, despite the uneasiness that this phenomenon caused. According to Pliny, as I have noted, Pallas' tomb proclaims that the Senate rewarded him for his "loyalty and piety toward his patrons" (*ob fidem et pietatem erga patronos*).³² The paradigm of the loyal freedman is here transcribed into the public sphere, while remaining anchored in the institution of patronage. Employing a similar tactic, the decree credits Pallas for "unparalleled loyalty and hard work" (*singularis fidei singularis industriae*); for being a "most temperate and loyal guardian of imperial finances" (*abstinentissimi fidelissimique custodis*); and again for "loyalty and diligence" (*fidem diligentiamque*).³³ Attributing to Pallas these traditional virtues helps to create the image of a dutiful servant, an image which Pliny dismantles.

The Senate's decree, again as related by Pliny, refers explicitly to Pallas' function as an *exemplum* when it stipulates that the document be engraved on bronze and displayed in a public place.³⁴

Utique, cum sit utile principis benignitatem promptissimam ad laudem praemiaque merentium inlustrari ubique et maxime iis locis, quibus incitari ad imitationem praepositi rerum eius curae possent, et Pallantis spectatissima fides atque innocentia exemplo provocare studium tam honestae aemulationis posset, ea quae x kal. Februarias quae proximae fuissent in amplissimo ordine optimus princeps recitasset senatusque consulta de iis rebus facta in aere inciderentur, idque aes figeretur ad statuum loricatam divi Iulii.

Since it will be useful to make known the emperor's most ready kindness in praising and rewarding persons of merit, everywhere but especially in settings where those placed in charge of overseeing his affairs may be encouraged to imitation, and the proven loyalty and innocence of Pallas may through example evoke zeal for such honorable emulation, let those

³² Plin. *Ep.* 7.29.2; 8.6.1.

³³ Plin. *Ep.* 8.6.6–7, 10.

³⁴ Plin. *Ep.* 8.6.13.

things which the *optimus princeps* said before a meeting of the Senate on January 23 and the decrees of the Senate concerning these matters be inscribed in bronze, and let this tablet be affixed to the loricated statue of Divus Julius.

Even if the decree was intended to meet a rhetorical need rather than to express true admiration, the contents were deemed sufficiently important to merit publication. In the context of Rome's tradition of exemplarity, the document emphasizes its own role in conveying a positive model for "those placed in charge of [the emperor's] affairs" (*praepositi rerum eius curae possent*). This expression is sufficiently vague, and the location of the inscription sufficiently prominent, for *praepositi* to be understood as incorporating not just other imperial freedmen, but also the equestrian and senatorial orders. Pallas' *fides* and *innocentia* are therefore construed as an *exemplum* to be rivaled by posterity, in particular by those responsible for governing the empire.

Considering Pliny's letters on Pallas from this perspective suggests that Roman aristocrats took diverse approaches to the *familia Caesaris* to accommodate both their political context and their rhetorical goals. Pallas and other high-ranking *liberti* undoubtedly created discomfort among the Roman elite. However, it was also possible to consider *liberti Augusti* in a more positive sense, namely as models for how most effectively to negotiate one's relationship with an autocratic ruler. As Pliny's account of Pallas suggests, inscribed texts were one mechanism through which this constructive approach found expression, whether in official documents displayed in public or in personal burial monuments. The ancient authors who discuss these texts draw a predominantly negative portrait of powerful freedmen, but disdain was not the only possible response.

Political Symbols from Social Practice

The novel position of the *familia Caesaris* came to represent a new kind of political authority, one based on the exercise of individual will through channels of personal influence, as opposed to the acquisition and transfer of power within an electoral system. Imperial slaves and freedmen were effective symbols of autocracy in part because the *princeps* elevated members of his household to positions of honor and prestige that were inconsistent with their legal status. Tacitus speaks directly to this symbolic role of *liberti Augusti* when he describes how Africa's

demonstration of loyalty to Otho in 69 CE was initiated by one of Nero's freedmen, rather than by the proconsul:³⁵

Crescens Neronis libertus (nam et hi malis temporibus partem se rei publicae faciunt) epulum plebi ob laetitiam recentis imperii obtulerat, et populus pleraque sine modo festinavit.

Crescens, a freedman of Nero (for in bad times, even these men make themselves part of the state) had given a public feast in celebration of the recent accession, and the people rushed to take the usual steps.

Tacitus' parenthetical comment on the civic participation of freedmen during "bad times" (*mala tempora*) emphasizes the negative connection between imperial freedmen and autocracy. Similarly, in the ethnographic mirror held up by *Germania*, kingship is portrayed as a form of government that encourages slaves and freedmen to rise above their station, whereas "freedmen who remain inferior are a testament to political liberty (*argumentum libertatis*)."³⁶ According to this formulation, prominent freedmen are both a product and an icon of monarchical rule.³⁷

The *familia Caesaris* illuminated the contours of the principate in part by revealing the avenues along which power flowed and the ways in which favor might be acquired or lost. The encompassing nature of the emperor's rule was reflected in the offices and duties bestowed on his slaves and freedmen. According to Philo, one of Caligula's attendants named Helicon was thought to have been bribed by the promise of special honors in Alexandria, and hoped to become "almost supreme in his power over a great portion of the world."³⁸ According to this view, Alexandria constitutes a microcosm in which Helicon's authority would approach that of his master, who presides over the Roman world. Both Philo and Josephus demonstrate sensitivity to the Jews' dependency on individual emperors for protection, particularly through the ties of clientage that linked the kings of Judaea to Rome. Yet coextensive with this – and clearly manifest in the case of Caligula's servant – was the potential for the system to malfunction at the hands of specific agents and personalities.³⁹

Statius' praise for the father of Claudius Etruscus includes a description of the duties of the *a rationibus*, which office marked a pinnacle of a freed career on the Palatine. Although the poem interrogates the instability

³⁵ Tac. *Hist.* 1.76.3.

³⁶ Tac. *Ger.* 25.3.

³⁷ See also e.g. Tac. *Ann.* 14.39.1–2; Plin. *Panegyricus* 88; Damon (2006: 246); Mouritsen (2011a: 93–109).

³⁸ Philo, *Leg.* 172–173.

³⁹ Hadas-Lebel (2006: 41–74).

of imperial favor, as I have already mentioned, Statius' description of the elder Claudius resonates with the motif of "one for many."⁴⁰ Statius repeats the word *unus* to emphasize that a single individual is responsible for an entire world's worth of revenue:⁴¹

... iam creditur uni
 sanctarum digestus opum partaeque per omnes
 divitiae populos magnique impendia mundi
 quicquid ab auriferis eiecat Hiberia fossis,
 Dalmatico quod monte nitet, quod messibus Afris
 verritur, aestiferi quicquid terit area Nili,
 quodque legit mersus pelagi scrutator Eoi,
 et Lacedaemonii pecuaria culta Galaesi
 perspicuaeque nives Massylaque robora et Indi
 dentis honos—uni parent commissa ministro,
 quae Boreas quaeque Eurus atrox, quae nubilus Auster
 invehit ...

Now to one alone was entrusted the distribution of the sacred treasure, riches garnered among all peoples, the outgoings of the great world. All that Iberia ejects from her goldmines, that shines in Dalmatian mountains, that is swept up in Africa's harvests, whatever sultry Nile threshes on his floor, what the sunken searcher of eastern sea picks up, cherished sheepfolds of Lacedaemonian Galaesus, transparent snow, Massylian timber, the beauty of Indian tusk: all that the North Wind and fierce East and cloudy South brings in, is entrusted to one minister and does his bidding.

By anchoring this freedman's economic responsibilities in a geographical description of the empire, Statius presents an analogue for the overarching authority of the *princeps*, whose presence is implicated by the term *minister*. One symbolic function of the *a rationibus* is therefore to match the scope of the emperor's authority in a particular arena; both the influence and the subordinate position of this agent allow the model to develop without threatening the global order that Statius sets up in the poem.

If freed offices aligned with the principate, so too could certain personal traits deemed necessary for the successful execution of these posts. The levels of responsibility assumed by the emperor and his subordinates carried an obligation to apply oneself to one's work and to forgo the gratification of private needs and desires. This ideal was reinforced through discourse surrounding both the *princeps* and the *familia Caesaris*.⁴² The expectation

⁴⁰ On the "one for many" *topos* in Latin poetry, see Hardie (1993: 3–10).

⁴¹ Stat. *Silv.* 3.3.86–97 (trans. Shackleton Bailey); see Weaver (1965a: 149; 1972: 259–266).

⁴² On imperial virtues, see Noreña (2011: esp. 37–100).

that a monarch would be assiduous and consistently available to his subjects is clearly articulated by an anecdote in which Hadrian dismisses a woman's request for a hearing with the excuse that "I don't have time." She responds, "Then stop being emperor," and so convinces him to grant her an audience.⁴³ Although this story was modeled on a common trope, it is worth pausing to ask how servile administrators provided constructive paradigms for the effort and personal sacrifice required from an effective leader.

Statius praises the father of Claudius Etruscus for the attentiveness and wisdom he applied to his office, as well as for his self-restraint in the indulgence of pleasures.⁴⁴ In his *consolatio* for a deceased member of the imperial household, Seneca urges Polybius, *a studiis* of the emperor Claudius, to assuage his grief by concentrating on his obligation to repay the emperor's favor with *fides* and *industria*. In this text, Claudius serves as an example for Polybius in the tireless observance of *labor*, *industria*, and *occupatio* ("employment") to protect the peace and leisure of the Roman people.⁴⁵ These duties are construed as an act of self-sacrifice, since "from the moment when Caesar dedicated himself to the world, he deprived himself of himself."⁴⁶ Seneca creates a parallel between the freedman's devotion to his imperial patron and the emperor's devotion to his subjects. "While Caesar possesses the world, you cannot give yourself to pleasure, to grief, or to anything else; you owe yourself entirely to Caesar."⁴⁷ This interaction of freed and imperial virtues creates an affinity between two levels of the status hierarchy that in turn brings the nature of the principate into relief.

Speaking about monarchy as a kind of self-sacrifice connects with the view that patronal relations were reciprocal, but it also looks ahead to the emergence of "pastoral power," which Foucault argues was introduced to the Greco-Roman system of government via the Christian church.⁴⁸ This type of power emphasizes benevolence toward the weak and construes the pastor's humility before God as an aid to his flock's salvation.⁴⁹ Early Christian texts also promulgated the view that governance required

⁴³ Dio Cass. 69.6.3; see Millar (1992: 3).

⁴⁴ Stat. *Silv.* 3.3.98: *vigil idem animique sagacis*; 3.3.106–108: *rara quies animoque exclusa voluptas / exiguaeque dapes et numquam laes a profundo / cura mero*. See Leppin (1996); contra Lotito (1974).

⁴⁵ Sen. *Ad Polybium* 7.2.

⁴⁶ Sen. *Ad Polybium* 7.2: *Ex quo se Caesar orbi terrarum dedicavit, sibi eripuit ...*

⁴⁷ Sen. *Ad Polybium* 7.3: *Caesare orbem terrarum possidente impertire te nec voluptati nec dolori nec ulli alii rei potes; totum te Caesari debes*.

⁴⁸ Foucault (2007: esp. 129–130, 154–156); see also above, pp. 61–70.

⁴⁹ Foucault (2007: 171–173) on the notion of "alternate correspondence," whereby the merit of the pastor depends on the weakness of his flock, but the salvation of the sheep is advanced by the pastor's own imperfection and humility before God. The infiltration of the notion of benevolent control into the social imagination of late antiquity is addressed by Brown (2002: 1–73).

submission of the self to service of the divine and of one's congregation. Christ therefore became a paradigmatic Good Shepherd, not just because of his kindness, but because by coming to earth as the savior of man, he relinquished his divinity to be the servant of God. In a famous episode in the Gospel of John, Christ says, "I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."⁵⁰ According to this model of leadership, a ruler must be both subservient to a higher power and willing to sacrifice himself for the good of his people.

Without digressing into this expansive topic, I would note again the connection between the language of slavery and the construction of a new form of political authority that came to fruition with the rise of Christianity. Seneca's reflections on monarchy in the *Ad Polybium* suggest that an ability to conceptualize the principate as a kind of service – comparable rhetorically to the services that slaves and freedmen performed for their masters and patrons – was present in Roman political thought of the first century CE. Although perhaps an extreme example of the imperial custom of refusing honors, Tiberius supposedly claimed that a good emperor "ought to serve (*servire*) the Senate, often the entire populace, and sometimes even individuals."⁵¹ In political discourse, as I have noted, metaphorical enslavement usually conveyed dishonor and degradation. However, these cases indicate that the language of slavery might also provide a template for elite behavior, even in application to the *princeps*.

A more common approach emphasized the emperor's role as the master and patron of his own slaves and *liberti* and defined his personal virtues according to these relationships. At the level of social practice, a "good" emperor was expected to demonstrate the qualities of a moderate slave-owner, rather than a cruel or overly indulgent one. According to Suetonius, Augustus was "no less severe than gracious and merciful" in keeping some of his slaves and freedmen in close confidence and punishing some leniently for minor offenses but others more harshly for crimes like adultery and extortion.⁵² For Suetonius, these stories complement the civic actions that helped to express Augustus' *clementia* ("forbearance") and *civilitas* ("politeness").⁵³ Likewise, during the earlier part of his reign,

⁵⁰ John 10:1–21; esp. 11: 'Εγώ εἰμι ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλὸς ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλὸς τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ τίθησιν ὑπὲρ τῶν προβάτων.

⁵¹ Suet. *Tib.* 29; cf. L. Crassus' speech for the *lex Servilia* in 106 BCE (Cic. *De Or.* 1.225–226), in which he makes the claim that the Senate ought to serve (*servire*) the people; see Morstein-Marx (2004: 235–236).

⁵² Suet. *Aug.* 67: *Patronus dominusque non minus severus quam facilis et clemens multos libertorum in honore et usu maximo habuit ...*

⁵³ Suet. *Aug.* 51.1.

Tiberius reportedly kept his slave and freed staff to a minimum, along with restricting his holdings in Italy and avoiding the adjudication of cases outside the court.⁵⁴

By contrast, less popular emperors were said to be enslaved to their slaves and freedmen. Claudius' perceived weaknesses were portrayed through this lens, and Nero's decline is marked in narratives about his reign by his relationship with the freedwoman Acte, among others.⁵⁵ In the biographical tradition reported by Suetonius, Nero's innate cruelty was already apparent in his father's execution of a freedman for not drinking as much as ordered.⁵⁶ Pliny sums up this conceptual rubric in the *Panegyricus*, when he praises Trajan for honoring ex-slaves in proper measure and for the appropriate reasons, namely *probitas* and *frugalitas*; "for you know," Pliny asserts pointedly, "that the primary indicator of an emperor who is not great is freedmen who are."⁵⁷ Again, the monarch's autonomy and self-restraint are configured through his ability to preserve domestic hierarchies, which had come to bear on the public sphere more consequentially in the empire than ever before.⁵⁸

To be sure, republican magistrates had used domestic staff to carry out civic duties. Conflict between dynasts enhanced the prominence of such *liberti*, whose influence and access to extraordinary military commands reached an apex at the end of the republic.⁵⁹ Both Marius and Sulla employed large numbers of slaves and freedmen – the former as agents of violence, the latter to establish a group of loyalists among the *plebs*.⁶⁰ Appian reports Sulla's manumission of the Cornelii in a passage that describes how the dictator retained a semblance of republican government but behaved like a monarch (οἷα δὴ βασιλεύων). Cicero's attacks on Chrysogonus in *Pro Roscio Amerino* likely downplay the role played by Sulla, and Plutarch's account places more weight on Sulla's influence than does Cicero; on balance, it is highly unlikely that Chrysogonus acted independently of his patron.⁶¹ Imperial historians who look back on Sulla's career thus reiterate the link between freedmen and autocracy.

⁵⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 4.6.7.

⁵⁵ Suet. *Cl.* 25.5, 29.1; cf. *Vit.* 2.5.5; on Nero, Tac. *Ann.* 13.12.

⁵⁶ Suet. *Nero* 5.1.

⁵⁷ Plin. *Panegyricus* 88: *Plerique principes, quum essent civium domini, libertorum erant servi ... scis enim, praecipuum esse indicium non magni principis magnos liberos.*

⁵⁸ Cf. Apollonius' speech on kingship to Vespasian at Philostr. *VA* 5.36, where he encourages the emperor, among other things, to lessen the pride of slaves and freedmen, who ought to be humble in the light of their master's power; on status inversion, see Roller (2001: 265–266).

⁵⁹ Treggiari (1969: 178, 184, 192).

⁶⁰ For Marius, Plut. *Mar.* 41.2, 43, 44.6; cf. App. *BCiv* 1.8.74. For Sulla, App. *BCiv* 1.11.100.

⁶¹ Cic. *Rosc. Am.* 22; Plut. *Cic.* 3.5; Treggiari (1969: 183–184); Dyck (2010: 10, 89).

Pompey's associates in the East included his *libertus*, Demetrius, whom Plutarch identifies as the most influential of the general's friends – that is, as part of a web of associates through whom Pompey organized the region “like a monarch.”⁶² The connection between the two men was so strong that Pompey reportedly rebuilt Gadara to please Demetrius, who hailed from that city.⁶³ Cato is said to have discovered the extent of Demetrius' power in Antioch when he encountered a throng of youths decked out in white raiment. Cato was dismayed at the thought that these provincials might be honoring him; but upon approaching the group's leader, he found instead that they were awaiting Demetrius.⁶⁴ No matter their level of historical accuracy, these anecdotes speak to a world in which Pompey's status in Asia translated conceptually to the prominence of his freedman. Demetrius' proximity to his patron was enough to legitimate flattery from the citizens of Antioch, who undoubtedly saw the benefit of ingratiating themselves with the general's agent.

At the same time, excessive reliance on servile staff by governors in the provinces could elicit criticism from fellow Romans. Cicero warns his brother Quintus to control his slaves and to restrict their services to private affairs during his governorship of Asia.⁶⁵ Cicero appears especially concerned by how many people have asked him for a recommendation to the freedman Statius, who could grant access to Quintus through a personal connection based on social dependency. Cicero remarks that “the very sight of a slave or freedman of such popular standing can have no sense of authority (*species ipsa tam gratiosi liberti aut servi dignitatem habere nullam potest*).”⁶⁶ His comments foreshadow the anxiety of imperial aristocrats, not only about inversions of the social hierarchy but also about the ideological problems surrounding slaves and freedman who acquire an abundance of power through their relationship to a man with *imperium*.

Julius Caesar, it has been noted, preferred to use political agents of freeborn or provincial extraction than his own slaves and *liberti*.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, Caesar's gestures toward autocracy may have been represented in part through his appointment of his own slaves at the head of the mint

⁶² Plut. *Pomp.* 40.1; cf. App. *Mith.* 12.14.94. Badian (1984: 81).

⁶³ Jos. *Bj* 1.155. Cf. Octavian/Augustus' treatment of Aphrodisias, the hometown of his freedman C. Iulius Zoilus, documented by *IAPH* 2007, 8.29 = Reynolds, *Aphrodisias and Rome*, 10 = *AE* 1984, 864 (text inscribed in the second to third century CE).

⁶⁴ Plut. *Pomp.* 40.

⁶⁵ Cic. *Q. Fr.* 1.1.17.

⁶⁶ Cic. *Q. Fr.* 1.2.3; see Treggiari (1969: 181).

⁶⁷ Treggiari (1969: 185).

and revenues.⁶⁸ Suetonius reports this aspect of Caesar's administrative activities to demonstrate that the dictator had overstepped the bounds of his authority.⁶⁹ Even if this claim had been generated by Caesar's opponents, it reflects a strand of political ideology that was already linking powerful *liberti* to one man's ascendancy, with the spectre of eastern monarchy looming in the background.⁷⁰ Likewise, Caesar is said to have purchased the favor of men from all backgrounds, including the favorite slaves and ex-slaves of those whose support he desired.⁷¹ Although not exactly the same problem that Cicero identifies in his brother's use of freedmen, Caesar's willingness to include slaves and *liberti* in his constituency and to give them special consideration in his colonial program looks ahead to later developments.⁷²

From these republican origins, the public employment of private slaves and *liberti* came to exemplify a political system that operated on ties of personal influence and revolved around the favor of the *princeps*. For the most prominent members of the *familia Caesaris*, direct contact with the emperor formed the basis of authority.⁷³ This is already apparent in Augustus' habit of watching games in the Circus from the upper rooms of his friends and *liberti*, as well as in his tendency to retire to a suburban villa owned by one of the latter.⁷⁴ Tiberius had Sabinus executed for "corrupting his freedmen and plotting against him," a charge which makes sense because of the level of access to the emperor that these *liberti* enjoyed.⁷⁵ On a more positive note, Statius praises the father of Claudius Etruscus for keeping close company with the *princeps*.⁷⁶ While literary sources often portray this feature of the imperial court as a threat to *libertas*, even the most scathing accounts betray the importance of servile staff to the administration, which included a surprisingly small number of freeborn officials in light of the expanse of the empire.⁷⁷

Moments of leisure were seen as presenting slaves and ex-slaves with unique opportunities to influence the emperor through informal channels.

⁶⁸ Suet. *Iul.* 76.3; cf. Butler and Cary (1927: *ad loc.*).

⁶⁹ Suet. *Iul.* 76.1.

⁷⁰ On the veracity of the anecdote, see Treggiari (1969: 186); cf. Sutherland (1985).

⁷¹ Suet. *Iul.* 27.

⁷² This is evidenced in part by the inclusion of freedmen in the *ordo decurionum* in some Caesarian colonies, a departure from regular practice; see Mouritsen (2011a: 73–74); but cf. Coles (2017).

⁷³ Millar (1992: 72–74).

⁷⁴ Suet. *Aug.* 45, 74.

⁷⁵ Tac. *Ann.* 4.70.1.

⁷⁶ *Silv.* 3.3.64–65.

⁷⁷ Garnsey and Saller (1987: 20–21); Mouritsen (2011a: 108).

Philo explains how Helicon insinuated himself into Caligula's good graces by attending the emperor day and night – even when the *princeps* was alone or resting – and by becoming his master's partner in exercise, at the baths, and at table.⁷⁸ This proximity enabled Helicon to manipulate Caligula through wit and charm, talents which worked all the more effectively on a man of dubious moral integrity.⁷⁹ According to Dio, Claudius' slaves and female courtiers took the greatest advantage of him when he was indulging in the pleasures of sex or drink.⁸⁰ Although these types of statement play into the rhetoric of the “bad” emperor, they are reflective of a mechanism that had real implications. Being close to the emperor presented an avenue to political influence that was emblemized by the *familia Caesaris*.

Freeborn citizens who wished to gain entry to the emperor's inner circle had to consider imperial freedmen as one plausible route to success. The disruptions of traditional status norms implied by such a strategy raised the hackles of certain members of the elite, but Seneca's *consolatio* addressed to Polybius demonstrates pragmatism in the use of an influential freedman to affect an imperial decision.⁸¹ Again, Helicon supposedly took bribes from the Alexandrians; and Dio says that Antonia Caenis, Vespasian's freed mistress, acquired a fortune by selling imperial offices and decisions as a result of her proximity to the emperor.⁸² Martial speaks to the role of literary texts in the negotiation of imperial favor, for instance when he asks Parthenius, Domitian's *cubicularius*, to give his work to the *princeps*.⁸³ Statius, too, claims in his dedication to Abascantus that he always tries to deserve well of the imperial household; “one who honors the gods in good faith also loves the priests.”⁸⁴

For all the criticism that such statements may have prompted, the role of slaves and *liberti* as mediators of imperial favor marked these figures as representatives not just of the reigning *princeps*, but of the sorts of behavior that were advisable under this form of government. The prominence of a discourse castigating tyrannical emperors and lionizing more moderate rulers overshadows the fact that such modes of comportment were always required to some degree under monarchy. Seneca uses Callistus as an example of how a private citizen might succumb to the kind of flattery

⁷⁸ Philo, *Leg.* 171, 175.

⁷⁹ Philo, *Leg.* 166–170.

⁸⁰ Dio Cass. 60.2.4–7.

⁸¹ On the *Ad Polybium*, see especially Atkinson (1985).

⁸² Philo, *Leg.* 172; Dio Cass. 65.14.3–4; Dio's depiction of Caenis in this context is not completely unfavorable.

⁸³ Mart. *Ep.* 5.6.7–9; cf. 12.11; on imperial staff as brokers for poets, see Nauta (2002: 341–349).

⁸⁴ Stat. *Silv.* 5 (*praef.*): *nam qui bona fide deos colit, amat et sacerdotes*.

required from a member of the *familia Caesaris* when he paints a scene in which this freedman, now well established on the Palatine, turns his former owner away at the door.⁸⁵ The anecdote functions to remind the reader of the Stoic tenet that human beings issue from the same stock; a change of circumstances may find one paying homage to a man whom one had previously sold as chattel. Even future emperors learned how to win over their predecessor's dependents.⁸⁶ On the other hand, as the case of Pallas suggests, encomia to imperial freedmen might generate *exempla* for imitation by those who wished to practice strategic obedience. Like Pallas, Polybius and the father of Claudius Etruscus are praised not only for their successes, but also for their *industria* and self-restraint.⁸⁷

Honors bestowed on freedmen demonstrated the role of imperial favor in achieving civic success. Augustus was supposed to have been moderate in this regard, only twice using freedmen as soldiers, and even then keeping low-status troops separate from the citizen army.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, Suetonius reports, Augustus "held many freedmen in the highest honor and employment" (*multos libertorum in honore et usu maximo habuit*).⁸⁹ The emperor Claudius received attention for having carried the promotion of freedmen to extremes, for example by bestowing the senatorial stripe on the son of an ex-slave; giving military honors and commands to Posides and Felix; and having Polybius walk between the consuls. Most flagrantly, Claudius "allowed" the Senate to bestow official insignia on Narcissus and Pallas.⁹⁰ As I argued in the case of Pallas, this latter tradition reflects the Senate's willingness to play its designated role in the theater of imperial politics by honoring *liberti* in ways usually reserved for members of the freeborn elite. At the same time, especially for later authors, it solidifies the implications of the *familia Caesaris* as a symbol of monarchy.

The rise and fall of *liberti Augusti* could signify the dangers of this political system. Just as often as the emergence of a prominent freedman marked him as the emperor's favorite, an ill-timed alliance or turn of opinion might catapult him to ruin.⁹¹ This aspect of the *familia Caesaris* was especially evident in moments of succession, when the personal basis of imperial rule came to the fore in the transfer of power from the *princeps*

⁸⁵ Sen. *Ep.* 47.9.

⁸⁶ Freedmen and women as a means of accession: Suet. *Oth.* 2.2; *Vit.* 2.5.

⁸⁷ Leppin (1996: 78).

⁸⁸ Suet. *Aug.* 25.2.

⁸⁹ Suet. *Aug.* 67.1; cf. 101.4.

⁹⁰ Suet. *Cl.* 24.1, 28; cf. 37.2 (Claudius praises Narcissus in the Senate). Also see Sen. *Apocolocyntosis* 6, 13, 15; Tac. *Ann.* 12.53; cf. Suet. *Gal.* 14.2.

⁹¹ Millar (1992: 74).

to a close relative, or in violent conflict. Numerous plots to assassinate a reigning *princeps* utilized one or more of his freedmen.⁹² The closeness of these figures to the emperor, the level of access they had to his chambers, and the amount of trust he put in members of his domestic staff increased the threat they posed to power, as well as the influence they might wield. In this way, the emperor's household contained on the one hand some of the most obvious agents of subversion, but was also instructive of the character of regimes based on the rule of one man.

Elite discourse about imperial freedmen was complicated by layers of social and political authority and by the elevation of the *familia Caesaris* above other categories of slave and freedman. As this discussion has made clear, although slaves played an important role in the administration, freedmen who had reached the pinnacle of their career paths most strongly exemplified the principate in the eyes of aristocrats. This obscures the impact of those in less eminent or influential positions who performed the quotidian labor of processing paperwork, delivering messages, balancing accounts, and doing myriad other tasks that kept the empire running. Although such personnel receive less attention in the literary sources than do freedmen like Pallas, their monuments suggest one way in which they contributed to a broader conversation about monarchy in the Roman world. Turning now to this material, I argue that members of the *familia Caesaris* produced their own commentaries on their role in society and on their relationship to the center of power by choosing how to address these issues in inscriptions.

Alternatives through Inscribed Writing

The social standing of a slave or freedman might be improved by the nobility of his master or patron. Connection to an aristocratic family brought not only opportunities for economic advancement, but also increased status. Such ties might be emphasized or expressed simply by regular nomenclature, for instance through the assumption of a famous *praenomen* and *nomen*; in the case of imperial freedmen, being a C. Iulius or M. Ulpius was worthy of recognition. When displayed on funerary and civic monuments, usually together with a form of *Augusti libertus* and citation of an official post, imperial *nomina* commemorated freedmen's inclusion in the empire's most elite household. Because the relationship between patron and freedman provided a conduit for personal influence,

⁹² Suet. *Cal.* 56.1; *Cl.* 13.2; *Gal.* 10.5; *Oth.* 6.2; *Dom.* 14.12.

but also because of the prestige associated with serving the state, members of the *familia Caesaris* stood to benefit from inscribing their names and those of their relations on stone.

Petronius parodies ex-slaves' investment in nomenclature in the *Cena Trimalchionis*. Trimalchio's insistence that his epitaph include his full name, C. Pompeius Trimalchio Maecenatianus, instantiates his aristocratic pretensions.⁹³ Adoptive *agnomina* in "-ianus" had been employed by elite families until the late second century BCE; for instance, L. Aemilius Paullus became P. Cornelius Scipio Aemelianus.⁹⁴ These conventions shifted in the late republic, when most adoptees retained their original *cognomina* in some fashion.⁹⁵ According to a review of the imperial evidence, adoptive names in "-ianus" lost popularity among the elite in the first century CE.⁹⁶ Instead, they came to suggest a servile background, with the *agnomen* preserving the name of a former master who had sold, given, or bequeathed the *libertus* to his current patron.⁹⁷ This suggests that such freedmen retained ties to their former owners, even after they had left the household.

Encolpius encounters his host's *tria nomina* in formal inscriptions, whereas Trimalchio is referred to simply by his *praenomen* in more familiar settings.⁹⁸ In addition to the epitaph, Cinnamus' dedication is addressed to C. Pompeius Trimalchio.⁹⁹ Other ex-slaves in the episode receive *tria nomina* in the context of writing displayed in public.¹⁰⁰ By satirizing this aspect of freed culture, Petronius again offers valuable testimony about how aristocrats viewed ex-slaves' inscriptions. Even in the absence of libertination, the prevalence of which declined significantly over the course of the first and second centuries CE, a freedman's *nomen* and (in rare cases) *agnomen* might highlight patronal ties that enhanced his standing.¹⁰¹ Petronius communicates an awareness of this phenomenon, which he exploits for the amusement of his readers.

⁹³ Petron. *Sat.* 71.12; Priuli (1975: 35–47); Schmeling (2011: *ad loc.*); on the allusion to Maecenas, see especially Beard (1997: 97–98).

⁹⁴ Shackleton-Bailey (1991: 53).

⁹⁵ Shackleton-Bailey (1991: 54–55).

⁹⁶ Salomies (1992: 20–24, 26–30); also see Salway (1994).

⁹⁷ Veyne (1962); Weaver (1972: 90–92 and n. 3); on the actual adoption of freedmen, see Gardner (1989).

⁹⁸ See Schmeling (2011: 103).

⁹⁹ Petron. *Sat.* 30.2.

¹⁰⁰ Petron. *Sat.* 38, on C. Pompeius Diogenes and <C.> Iulius Proculus.

¹⁰¹ On the decline of libertination in *tria nomina* of freedmen in the second century, see Mouritsen (2011a: 296); Duthoy (1989); cf. Taylor (1961); Huttunen (1974: 129).

The rise of the *familia Caesaris* added another dimension to these onomastic practices, because imperial *nomina* identified ex-slaves as belonging to a privileged subgroup. Their elevated status relied above all on the encompassing authority of their patron. In an excursus that lists powerful *liberti* drawn from throughout Roman history, the elder Pliny first recalls men whose patrons were republican magnates – namely Sulla, Catulus, Lucullus, Pompey, Sextus Pompey, and M. Antony. With respect to his own times, Pliny need only mention the Senate’s grant of praetorian insignia to a freedman of Claudius (probably Pallas).¹⁰² In this survey, the difference between republic and principate is marked by the consolidation of several powerful patrons into a single family, which had the ability to elevate its ex-slaves to great heights. Although freedmen of aristocrats under the empire enjoyed many of the same opportunities as had their republican counterparts, Pliny’s account reveals just how much the focus had shifted toward high-ranking imperial freedmen.

Epigraphic writing that issued from the imperial center played a key role in this process. With the rise of monarchy, as I discussed in [Chapter 2](#), the pursuit and commemoration of political honor were reoriented around the figure of the *princeps*. In an important study relevant to this phenomenon, Alföldy examined the impact of the Augustan program on Roman epigraphic culture.¹⁰³ Standardizing the design of inscriptions for entablature on buildings, milestones, burial monuments, and other settings, Augustus followed existing traditions while developing an approach that supported the principles of his regime. For instance, gilded lettering that exemplified the new Golden Age underscored the restoration of order to the community after a long period of civil upheaval.

Along similar lines, the reproduction of imperial *nomina* in inscriptions set up by members of the *familia Caesaris* helped to disseminate the ideology of the principate. I suggest here that the emperor’s servile staff played an active role in this process by commissioning burial and civic monuments. More specifically, the relationship that bound *liberti Augusti* to their patron underscored the integration of personal ties with political institutions. Patterns in the epigraphy of the *familia Caesaris* reflect the institutionalization of monarchy, as the balance between private household and bureaucracy tilted increasingly toward the latter. In addition to supporting the administration of the empire, imperial freedmen were poised

¹⁰² Plin. *HN* 35.58.200–201.

¹⁰³ Alföldy (1991).

to contribute to Roman political discourse simply by commemorating themselves and each other.

Patterns in the nomenclature of imperial freedmen reflect the distinctive privilege to be gained from belonging to the *familia Caesaris*. Analysis of the relevant inscriptions has shown that members of the imperial household continued to use formulaic indicators of status, whereas freed slaves in private households began to omit them, as did freeborn citizens.¹⁰⁴ Likewise, beginning in the Flavian period, imperial freedmen resisted the tendency to shorten the abbreviation *lib(ertus)* to the single letter “*l*,” presumably because the extended form made their association with the *princeps* more visible.¹⁰⁵ Among adult males, such labels almost always appear in conjunction with an occupational title, thus approaching a “badge of office,” more than a straightforward citation of legal status.¹⁰⁶

The evidence for these onomastic patterns comes primarily from inscriptions that were commissioned by and for *liberti Augusti*, rather than from official registries or other administrative sources. On that basis, the retention of status indicators by imperial freedmen can be interpreted as a trend that reflects the significance of the title *Aug. lib.* to the men and women who used it. This does not imply that commemorators in the wider population abandoned status indicators because they were ashamed of their backgrounds, but rather that the emperor’s *liberti* had a particular interest in maintaining the form. The impetus to retain status indicators therefore suggests one way in which *liberti Augusti* derived honor from service to the *princeps* and applied the patron–freedman relationship to the civic sphere.

The role of *vernae* (“home-born slaves”) in the *familia Caesaris* should also be accounted for in this context. In the epigraphy of private households, *vernae* tend to occupy a special place with respect to the *paterfamilias*, perhaps approaching surrogate kin.¹⁰⁷ The term was normally applied to private slaves who died young, under the age of 25.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, in Latin

¹⁰⁴ Weaver (1963: 272; 1972: 43).

¹⁰⁵ For the figures, see Weaver (1963: 276); *ser.* for *servus* and *vern.* for *verna* also predominated over abbreviations of one letter.

¹⁰⁶ Weaver (1972: 168–169) stresses this point in a discussion of the *SC Claudianum*, specifically with respect to the small proportion of sons who were born to *servi Caesaris* and supposed *ingenuae* and receive the imperial status indication. Herrmann-Otto (1994: 115–119) argues that it is likely that the emperor applied this law to the *familia Caesaris* in our period selectively, on the basis of recruitment needs and fiscal concerns. Weaver’s general conclusions about the use of status indication as a marker of prestige among *liberti Augusti* are valid, since the decline of this practice among civilians is well attested, but for a critique of Weaver’s thesis about marriage patterns in the *familia Caesaris*, see Mouritsen (2011a: 297–298).

¹⁰⁷ Rawson (1986: 186–197).

¹⁰⁸ Bruun (2013: 27); cf. Herrmann-Otto (1994: 62–67, 413).

literature, *vernae* are idealized in ways that downplay the violence of the Roman slave system and, more specifically, of the rape of slave women.¹⁰⁹ Analysis of inscriptions attesting private and imperial *vernae* has revealed striking differences between the two groups.¹¹⁰ The designation of *verna* did not become popular in the *familia Caesaris* until the reign of Hadrian, but scattered instances appear in epigraphic material from the Julio-Claudian and Flavian periods.¹¹¹ In contrast to home-born slaves in private households, *vernae Caesaris* continued to receive the title well into adulthood, a pattern which suggests that the term had special meaning in the imperial administration. The most compelling explanation is that the title “*verna*” became (*inter alia*) a sign of prestige, especially among elite *dispensatores* and other financial staff.¹¹²

Like the inclusion of *Aug. lib.* in ex-slaves’ *tria nomina*, the application of *verna* to adult members of the *familia Caesaris* suggests that language from domestic contexts had been transformed to meet the needs of those involved in governing the empire. Although the *princeps* was indirectly present in the funerary monuments of his servile staff, the form and content of these artifacts were determined primarily by their commemorators.¹¹³ Despite the fact that most epigraphically attested *vernae Caesaris* post-date the Julio-Claudians, the inclusion of “*verna*” in an administrative *cursus* would have reinforced the ideology of empire by advertising the extent to which domestic relationships affected public life. Neither the commemorators nor the viewers of these inscriptions would have forgotten that the word also referred to the most intimate of master–slave relationships. The cooption of *verna* by the *familia Caesaris* thus exemplifies the centrality of a single, dominant figure to the organization of the state.

Currents in the epigraphic practices of imperial slaves and *liberti* helped to define the principate by emphasizing its association with personal patronage. At the same time, I would argue, other trends demonstrate the solidification of this mode of government over time. The restructuring of political authority under Augustus prompted the aristocracy to adjust its

¹⁰⁹ Wiedemann (1985: 164); Hor. *Epod.* 2.65; Mart. *Ep.* 2.90.9, 3.58.22.

¹¹⁰ Herrmann-Otto (1994).

¹¹¹ Weaver (1972: 51).

¹¹² Herrmann-Otto (1994: 195, 402). For the age distribution, see p. 413, Appendix I (Lebensaltertabelle): 52% (*N*=108) of *vernae* in the *familia Caesaris* died at age 21 or older, versus 5% (*N*=312) among *vernae* in private households. See also n. 106, above.

¹¹³ See Herrmann-Otto’s (1994: 128) insight that the emperor is present in the inscriptions of imperial *vernae* but only indirectly, since he never appears as the actual commemorator of the tomb in his role as a patron.

approach to civic honor and to introduce new behavioral models. One crucial development was the acknowledgment, for better or worse, of the monarch's position as the supreme arbiter of civic achievement. The ways in which members of the *familia Caesaris* represented their own successes could reveal the basic stability of this system, as well as speak to the dangers it posed.

Nomenclature is again instructive, because it shows in broad terms how the normalization of the principate could be expressed in the epigraphic landscape. *Aug(usti) lib(ertus)* became the standard form of status indication around the time of the emperor Claudius. Whereas alternatives such as *Divi Aug(usti) lib(ertus)* appear in *tria nomina* up to this point, little variation occurs in later periods. Weaver's explanation of this phenomenon contains powerful consequences:¹¹⁴

the main reason for this change is the general movement of freedmen away from considering themselves associated with a particular emperor ... Among freedmen there grew a sense of belonging not to a particular emperor but to an increasingly institutionalised Familia Caesaris. From being *an* emperor's freedmen they became 'Imperial' freedmen.

This change signals the emergence of a political culture in which the endurance of the principate went unquestioned. Modern historians often identify 69 CE as the point after which aristocrats asked not whether Rome should be ruled by a monarch but who the next *princeps* would be.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, well before this milestone, the institutionalization of the principate was evident in the commemorative practices of the *familia Caesaris*.

Although the argument may seem paradoxical at first glance, naming patterns suggest that imperial slaves and *liberti* symbolized both the personal basis of the emperor's authority and the fixity of a political system that operated largely through patronage. One illustrative example comes from the funerary altar of Laeonas, a *dispensator* in the imperial service who was buried by his son, a freed *procurator*, at Formia in the second century CE (fig. 7):¹¹⁶

Laeonae | vern(ae) disp(ensatori) qui | vixit ann(os) LXVI | et est
conversatus | summa sollicitudine | [i]n diem quoad vixit | circa tutelam

¹¹⁴ Weaver (1972: 45–46), quotation from p. 45.

¹¹⁵ E.g. Potter (2009: 190); cf. Mackay (2004: 221–222).

¹¹⁶ *CIL* 10.6093.



Figure 7 Tomb marker of Laeonas, *dispensator*; Formia, second century CE.
Photo: author.

pr|aetori Amazonicus | Augg(ustorum) lib(ertus) procurat(or) | patri
piissimo cum | [f]ratribus suis b(ene) m(erenti) f(ecerunt)

To Laeonas *verna dispensator* who lived sixty-six years and served the praetor in charge of *tutela* with the greatest care, every day as long as he lived. Amazonicus, imperial freedman and *procurator* made this for his most dutiful father, who was well-deserving, in conjunction with his brothers.

Laeonas' prestige is enhanced by his connection to the emperor, as suggested by the title *verna dispensator*, but is also filtered through a layer of bureaucracy. The epitaph celebrates the care with which Laeonas performed his duties, not for the *princeps* directly but for the praetor

in charge of guardianship. Yet the assertion that Laeonas served in this role “every day as long as he lived” underscores the stability of his post, whereas the praetorship would have regularly changed hands. In this way, the emperor’s authority permeates the entire structure of command. As represented in this inscription by a freed *procurator* commemorating his enslaved parent, the imperial household constitutes a true civil service, whose constancy and insulation from elite competition rested on the ascendancy of its patron.¹¹⁷

Even at this advanced stage of development, the *familia Caesaris* continued to embody the emperor’s dual role as a slave-owner and political figure. Comparable material from the Julio-Claudian period includes a small group of inscriptions in which the ex-slaves of imperial freedmen are identified by variants of the phrase *Augusti liberti libertus* (“freedman of an imperial freedman”), without attesting the immediate patron’s *cognomen*. The most likely reason for this omission is that the title was intended not to identify precisely the freed ex-master, but rather to create an association with the emperor’s household.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, one finds numerous instances from across the first and second centuries in which imperial *liberti* are commemorated by their own ex-slaves in terms of both official posts and domestic concerns.¹¹⁹

The line between public and private had been vaguely drawn in the republic, as well, when aristocrats conducted public business in the *atria* of their houses and governed with the help of their slaves and *liberti*. Yet never had one man’s personal staff reached such a high level of prominence, spread over such a broad area, or been identified so consistently with the Roman state.¹²⁰ The honors bestowed on individuals like Pallas presented the most obvious (or egregious) examples of how imperial favor might elevate one’s prestige, but less prominent members of the *familia Caesaris* set up monuments that expressed this connection. Moreover, especially at these lower levels, the bureaucratic nature of the imperial service became increasingly apparent as individuals remained the same post for extended

¹¹⁷ See especially Panciera (2007: 79).

¹¹⁸ Weaver (1972: 208–209) on *CIL* 6.3879, 5294, 5909, 20002; 14.5909; *AE* 1953, 24.

¹¹⁹ E.g. *CIL* 5.42, 7751; 6.6191, 8446, 8449, 8547, 8604, 8775, 8891, 8954, 8968, 8973, 8979, 33738, 33771, 37760; *AE* 1985, 183; *AE* 1991, 309; *Not. Sc.* 1917, 291, n. 6; *Bull. Comm. Arch. Rom.* 1982–1983, 125–127, n. 34. Cf. imperial freedmen who commemorate their own ex-slaves in e.g. *CIL* 10.4142; 6.5254, 10170.

¹²⁰ Mouritsen (2011a: 93–94); cf. Friedländer (1979: 33).

periods and commanded their own *familiae*, with or without the direct oversight of the *princeps* from whom they drew their prestige.

Conclusion

Whether by reproducing imperial *nomina* in their monuments or by offering more detailed representations of monarchy, members of the *familia Caesaris* testify to the rise of autocracy at Rome. Only a handful of *liberti Augusti* reached the levels of wealth and influence that men like Pallas and the father of Claudius Etruscus enjoyed in the prime of their careers. At this echelon of the imperial household, ex-slaves furnished models for aristocratic behavior by reaping publicly the benefits of their loyal service and of their proximity to the center of power. Pliny's treatment of Pallas reveals two contrasting approaches to this phenomenon – that of the Claudian Senate, which endorsed an ex-slave's ability to stand as a positive *exemplum*, and the author's own perspective, which repudiated the inversion of status norms.

Largely by virtue of their standing at court, prominent *liberti* risked sudden changes of fortune when the lines of partisanship were redrawn or the winds of favor turned in another direction. Personnel at lower grades of the administration not only derived prestige from their association with the *princeps* but also constituted a servile bureaucracy with several layers of officialdom. These individuals may have benefited as much from their relative independence, when compared to the freedmen of private patrons, as they did from their close association with the emperor. *Liberti Augusti* in the provinces are attested in municipal roles, in addition to functioning as agents of government. However, even as onomastic patterns reflect the institutionalization of the slave and freed civil service over the course of the principate, they also retain the basic form of the patron–freedman relationship and, in this sense, signal the translation of domestic structures to the public sphere.

In arguing for this interpretation of the literary and epigraphic sources, I do not wish to deny the importance of rhetorical *topoi* in which metaphorical enslavement to the emperor was framed in starkly negative terms. Yet these aspects of Roman political discourse were in constant and productive dialogue with others, some of which recognized the efficacy of servile strategies in managing autocracy. The epigraphic culture of the *familia Caesaris* was one site for the contestation of social and political ideas, including the nature of honor under a monarchy and the channels through

which authority passed. Monuments commissioned by *liberti Augusti* were instrumental in enacting these changes because they confronted members of the elite with examples of the benefits to be gained not just from adopting a stance of obedience, but also from commemorating the personal virtues that were attendant upon this position.

Telling Life Stories

Focusing on specific practices or institutions, such as the commemoration of personal virtues and the *familia Caesaris*, has helped to clarify some of the ways in which freedmen developed strategies that were taken up by the imperial aristocracy as it negotiated its position with respect to the *princeps*. These arguments account for the cultural impact of *liberti*, who participated in broader conversations about honor, virtue, and the preservation of memory sparked by Rome's transition to monarchy. In this [final chapter](#), I extend the same approach to a problem that was equally critical to how members of the elite understood their political and social environments – namely, the representation of life narratives according to indicators of continuity and transition. Commemorators of inscribed monuments chose to depict their lives and the lives of their commemorands on the basis of select frameworks, some of which were defined by dominant ideologies, others by alternative sources of meaning. In the case of freedmen, this entailed confronting the related ideas that manumission created a new entity, the *libertus*, and that enslavement left a shameful mark on one's past. The strategy of using alternative frameworks like work and family to establish continuity in the freed life course represents a departure from such norms. In turn, I argue, this strategy resonates with those adopted by members of the freeborn elite who endeavored to supplement or replace the *cursus honorum* with ethical and spiritual measures.

The study of the life course in sociology has shown how stages of human development are shaped by contextual factors, which determine the parameters for making individual decisions.¹ Major transitions in the life course in contemporary Western societies may include moving out of one's parents' house, having children, serving in the military, and retiring from the workforce.² The form and timing of these transitions depends

¹ Elder et al. (2004: 12).

² Elder et al. (2004: 8); on military deployment, see the review article of MacLean and Elder (2007).

on multiple variables, including socio-economic conditions, political climate, and cultural norms, as well as biological determinates like disease. Although personal choices imply a certain level of agency, external forces impose significant limitations on the range of possibilities from which one might choose. In the United States, for example, a recent college graduate burdened by debt and struggling to find adequate employment may opt to live with her parents, perhaps weighing economic benefits against the idea that having one's own apartment would otherwise be a "good thing." Far from being objective, such indicators of transition in the life course reflect standards established by a given culture.³

The nature and arrangement of life-course transitions in the Greco-Roman world differed substantially from those in contemporary Western countries. The application of demographic techniques to the ancient evidence has helped to illuminate the shape of the ancient life course at the level of populations.⁴ From a qualitative perspective, I am concerned primarily with how people at different levels of the Roman social hierarchy chose to depict the life course in terms of key transitions. Whether conveyed by inscribed monuments or by literature, representations of individual lives were by necessity highly selective, since the author or commemorator was compelled to select and to organize biographical information.⁵ In commissioning a monument, for example, commemorators might decide to include a political or administrative career, changes in legal status, marriage, or military service. These types of transition frequently work together to generate complex personae, but each signals a different institution or framework from which it derives its primary significance. That is to say that commemorators balanced various sources of meaning to provide an account of the commemorand's life. Along similar lines, literary biographies might depict a sequence of achievements, a set of character traits, an ethical or spiritual journey, or some composite of these themes.⁶ In both media, the author's choice of what frameworks to use, and in what combinations, speaks to underlying assumptions about how best to define the individual in relation to the community.⁷

³ Harlow and Laurence (2002: 3).

⁴ E.g. Saller (1994); Harlow and Laurence (2002); Parkin (2011). Youth: Eyben (1993); Kleijwegt (1991); Rawson (2003; 2011). Old age: Parkin (2003). Military service: Rosenstein (2004). Age at marriage: Scheidel (2007); Saller (1987); Shaw (1987); cf. Lelis, Percy, and Verstraete (2003).

⁵ In reference to literary biography, see Momigliano (1993: 11).

⁶ On the form, see Leo (1901); Momigliano (1993: 18–20); Hägg (2012: 187–232).

⁷ For the relationship between biography and the history of the individual, see Swain (1997: 3–22).

These observations suggest one productive way to think about ex-slaves' commemorative monuments in the context of Roman imperial culture. According to the ideology of slave-owning, captivity and freedom defined the essential transitions in a freedman's life course. Enslavement by any means led to social death, whereas manumission initiated an entirely new chapter, into which the slave was "reborn" as a freedman.⁸ From this point of view, the master–slave and patron–freedman relationships provided the most important connection between different phases of the ex-slave's life course. Some *liberti* used this model when commemorating their patrons, themselves, and each other, for example by expressing gratitude for their freedom or by focusing almost exclusively on their achievements after manumission. However, others drew on alternative sources to relate the servile past to the freed present. In doing so, they reached beyond the institution of slavery to produce cohesive life narratives on the basis of personal relationships, work, religious cult, and (for reasons made clear below) citation of the deceased's birthday. Although dispersed unevenly through the epigraphic record, these strategies demonstrate how considerations other than captivity and freedom might counter measures imposed from above.

As I have already proposed, the representation of freed culture in Petronius' *Satyrica* suggests that Roman aristocrats in the first century CE had some knowledge of these tactics, at least to the point that they would find humorous moments when fictional ex-slaves ascribe meaning to the servile past or even to their origins before captivity. However, these stereotypes do not represent the full spectrum of elite responses to freedmen, whose commemorative practices generated behavioral models at the same time as they caused discomfort. Following this line of inquiry, I examine biographical applications of metaphorical slavery and freedom in imperial Stoicism and Pauline Christianity to ask how servile culture may have contributed to definitions of the ethical or spiritual life course during the early empire. Here, as elsewhere, I seek to emphasize the extent to which slavery and manumission helped to shape conceptions of the individual by creating a dialogue between social groups with distinctive experiences of power and subjugation.

⁸ Patterson (1982: especially 1–14, 211); cf. Buckland (1908: 715); Mouritsen (2011a: 37–38).

Continuity and Change in the Freed Life Course

When deciding what information to include in an inscription, freed commemorators encountered a problem unique to their social status. Whether captured, exposed, born into slavery, or enslaved by other means, human chattels were considered socially dead and natally alienated; they were denied an identity apart from their owners and stripped of legitimate ties to their ancestral heritage or living kin.⁹ Although slaves resisted these pressures in various ways – for example, by creating families and social networks – their lives took shape along lines stipulated by masters and by the slaveholding society at large.¹⁰ Training, occupation, sex, marriage, and children all came under the control of slave-owners, and even the most indulgent master retained the authority to sell slaves away from their families.¹¹ In these and in many other ways, captivity placed extreme limitations on the extent to which enslaved people in the Roman world could exercise agency in determining the course of their lives.

Manumission held a central place in the dominant model of the servile life course, at least for slaves and freedmen from urban households and the *familia Caesaris*, contexts in which manumission was frequent, although not automatic. Changing a person's legal status from *servus* to *libertus* created a profound distinction between his past and present by situating him on the opposite side of a foundational division between slave and free.¹² This transition was symbolized in part by the addition of his ex-master's *praenomen* and *nomen* to his original slave name to form the *tria nomina* of a free person. Moreover, in Roman law, formal manumission did not transfer ownership from one party to another but produced an entirely new entity, the *libertus*, who might be expected to start his life over in key respects.¹³ Citizenship was granted together with freedom if the correct procedures had been observed or (under the principate) could be sought by Junian Latins through the fulfillment of legal criteria. Even informal manumission marked a fundamental change in the life course during this period, since the *lex Iunia* specifically protected the freedom of slaves released from captivity *inter amicos*.¹⁴

⁹ Patterson (1982: 1–14); cf. (2012). For applications of the theory to ancient slavery, see e.g. Bradley (1994: 16); Joshel (1992: 24, 29–30); Bradley and Cartledge (2011: 1); Perry (2014: 19).

¹⁰ Patterson (1982: 5); cf. Brown (2009).

¹¹ Bradley (1994: 52).

¹² *Inst. Iust.* 1.9.

¹³ Patterson (1982: 210–211); Mouritsen (2011a: 37–38).

¹⁴ Mouritsen (2011a: 85–86).

At the same time, manumission failed to absolve *liberti* of duties and obligations associated with prior servitude; and even a so-called independent freedman relied on his ex-master's standing for elements of his persona. At a very basic level, freed slaves took their *nomina* from a former master or mistress.¹⁵ This connected freedmen indelibly to the household in which they had served and installed their patron's clan as a proxy for ancestral history, of which their status as chattels had deprived them.¹⁶ Practically speaking, Roman law protected ex-masters' right to *obsequium* and imposed a range of punishments on freedmen who were found to be *ingratus* ("ungrateful") toward patrons.¹⁷ The requirement of *operae* manifested in a tangible sense ex-slaves' perceived indebtedness to those who had bestowed the "gift" of freedom.¹⁸ Therefore, from the master's perspective, the prevailing themes that spanned the divide between slave and freed status depended on the perpetuation of an original power imbalance and on the stigma of slavery, which helped to justify a host of restrictions.

When *liberti* selected what information to include in a commemorative monument, they could use the biographical frameworks provided by the ideology of slave-owning, for instance by attesting the relationship between master and slave as it changed into one between patron and freedman.¹⁹ Some Roman freedmen explicitly addressed in their inscriptions the receipt of freedom, enfranchisement, and various benefits that a change in status had conferred on them and their offspring.²⁰ Others concentrated on economic and civic achievements after manumission or on the new family line, in some cases even allowing the servile past to fade into the background. This latter phenomenon has been identified in a corpus of funerary portraits that show freed couples in the toga and palla, alongside their freeborn children, as well as in other social units.²¹ Emphasis on manumission or on activities undertaken after release from captivity accommodates to some degree the ideology of slave-owning, because it

¹⁵ Mouritsen (2011a: 36–42, 49–51, 70, 98, 147–148).

¹⁶ Patterson (1991: 237–238). Cf. Morstein-Marx (2004: 15–16, 76) on Cicero's references to collective ancestry at *Leg. Man.* 11, 14, 55; the speech's audience would have included many freed slaves.

¹⁷ Waldstein (1986: 60–69).

¹⁸ On manumission as gift exchange, see Patterson (1982: 209–247); on *operae*, see Gardner (1993: 20–21); Waldstein (1986); Treggiari (1969: 75–78); Masi Doria (2011).

¹⁹ Rare epitaphs in which private *liberti* refer to their patrons as "master" (*dominus/a*) are suggestive, albeit inconclusive; in addition to *CIL* 6.26926 = *CLE* 461, discussed in Chapter 2, see *CIL* 6.41179; cf. *AE* 1968, 109.

²⁰ E.g. *CIL* 1².1570 = *ILLRP* 977 = *CLE* 56; 6.28228 = *CLE* 1054; *CIL* 6.22355a = *ILS* 8432; 6.700 = *ILS* 3944; *AE* 1983, 324; cf. 14.2298 = *ILS* 1949 (commissioned by an elite patron).

²¹ E.g. Zanker (1975); Kleiner (1977); George (2005).

imposes a conceptual break in the life course. There is no reason to assume that this approach reflects ex-slaves' subjective feelings, but the rhetorical efficacy of foregrounding freedom in a commemorative setting cannot be dismissed out of hand.

The strategic nature of these claims emerges with particular clarity when one considers tactics that freedmen employed to lend continuity to their life narratives, rather than to mark transitions. In what follows, I identify several alternative frameworks through which commemorators established coherence in the life course of former slaves. Although frequently accompanied by elements that reflect or reproduce social norms, these strategies provided ex-slaves with ways to organize their personal histories on grounds other than the patron–freedman relationship or the perceived advantages of manumission, such as legal marriage and the accumulation of wealth. Alternative modes of representation constitute deviations from regular practice and are therefore numerically few. Nevertheless, they deserve consideration not only for the light they shed on freed culture, but also (when taken collectively) for their potential engagement of literary and philosophical discourse.

Personal Relationships

Although the master–slave relationship held pride of place in the ideology of slaveholding, other types of bond existed between slaves in slavery and, under the right circumstances, might endure into freedom. Continuity in personal relationships after manumission helped to bridge the divide that a change in legal status introduced to ex-slaves' biographies. Freedom was a positive outcome in many respects, but also threatened to destabilize families and social networks, particularly when slaves were manumitted individually without consideration for their immediate kin.²² Petronius refers to this phenomenon in the *Satyricon*, when Hermeros claims that he purchased the freedom of his *contubernalis* and when Trimalchio bequeaths to one of his slaves a small plot of land and that man's partner.²³ The disruption of slave families by manumission is difficult to measure in Latin funerary epigraphy, because commemorators usually identify existing bonds, rather than those that were broken.²⁴ However, some *liberti*

²² On the slave and freed family, see especially Flory (1978); Rawson (1966); Mouritsen (2011b).

²³ Petron. *Sat.* 57.6, 71.2.

²⁴ See Mouritsen (2011a: 152–153; 2013) on the prevalence of mixed-status unions. This situation is different from that of “broken families” (i.e. families separated by sale during slavery) identified by Rawson (1966). See also Hopkins (1978: 164–165); Kleijwegt (2012).

emphasize the fact that a personal relationship survived from captivity to freedom, a strategy which allowed them to make similar claims to the one that Petronius satirizes through his freed characters.

I approach this problem by examining cases in which freed slaves are attested alongside a family member or close associate in terms that specifically evoke the servile past. To preview the examples I will proffer, I note a few commemorators who chose to apply the word *conservus* ("fellow slave") to relationships that involved a *libertus*. Others opted to describe a legitimate husband or wife as their *contubernalis*, a word which refers to *de facto* unions conceded to slaves in captivity, not to marriages between two free citizens (*conubium*). These deviations from the norm are in some ways comparable to the practice of commemorating fellow freedmen as *colliberti*, but they suggest an impetus to reach back even farther into the past.²⁵ As Rawson noted in a study of *de facto* marriages at Rome, slaves who became free "did not necessarily change their whole personal vocabulary when their status changed," and some continued to use the language that had originally described their unions.²⁶ These patterns have implications for freedmen's commemorative culture, as well as for social history. Commemorators who applied the language of servitude to their current relationships chose to highlight the maintenance of those relationships across status boundaries. In doing so, they not only celebrated a source of stability but also resisted the ideological forces that separated the freed life course into distinct chapters.

As I have already mentioned, aristocratic authors found occasion to refer to freedmen as slaves, whether to convey an ex-slave's dependability or as a form of invective. Rather than weakening the significance of the epigraphic material under consideration here, these features of elite usage confirm that the terminology of slavery could be manipulated for rhetorical reasons. Commemorators who used servile language to describe relationships that continued after manumission also exploited linguistic conventions to achieve a desired effect. The application of *conservus* or *contubernalis* to individuals of any status required special consideration on the part of commemorators, and these terms appear only in modest numbers, when compared to words like *coniunx*. Roughly 300 epitaphs

²⁵ For *colliberti* commemorated in familiar terms, see e.g. *CIL* 6.18619 (*collibertus optimus*), 19693 (*colliberta fidelissima*), 34899a (*collibertus optimus*); 5.2248 (*colliberta carissima*); *AE* 1987, 81 (*collibertus carissimus*), *AE* 1991, 192 (*collibertus carissimus*). On fellow slaves and freedmen in professional settings, see Joshel (1992: 161).

²⁶ Rawson (1974: 294); the basic premise is upheld by Treggiari (1981); Shaw (1991: 88); cf. Flory (1978: 87).

from Rome and Italy contain the term *conservus/-a*; of these, thirty-two use the term to identify a relationship involving at least one ex-slave.²⁷ In Treggiari's sample of 260 pairs of *contubernales* from Rome, ninety-six couples comprised two free persons; fourteen of those couples were verifiably freed, and many of the *incerti* are likely to have been freed, as well.²⁸

The "misuse" of these relational terms suggests two ways in which freed commemorators might alter epigraphic formulae to accentuate the durability of their bonds. Ex-slaves' willingness to emphasize continuity over status has been studied on the basis of a much larger sample through extensive analysis of the onomastic evidence.²⁹ Contrary to the belief that most *liberti* tried to obscure their children's servile roots by giving them Latin names, an examination of nomenclature across generations has shown that a substantial minority named their offspring after themselves – even if that meant preserving a Greek *cognomen* that would signal the family's background. In light of this fact, it is no longer possible to assume that freedmen's commemoration of freeborn children simply reflects a desire to advertise upward mobility. These monuments also speak to the significance that *liberti* attributed to their capacity to maintain stable families after manumission and (for citizens) to generate legitimate lines of descent.

One concern here is with the children of ex-slaves, and so with the link between present and future; in a similar fashion, select freedmen established continuity with the past at the risk of drawing attention to their inferior status. An inscription from the Via Appia commissioned during the first century CE employs this strategy in a particularly elegant

²⁷ I counted non-Christian epitaphs that are sufficiently intact for a determination about status to be made. Because *conservus* connotes a servile background in this context, individuals whose nomenclature would otherwise classify them as *incerti* could be identified as *liberti*. Freed *conservi* are attested in *CIL* 6.4402, 5935 [*conservus* restored], 7027, 9253, 13575, 14188 [restored], 14697, 16304, 17776, 18565, 19315, 19871, 19991, 22606, 27790, 29114, 38878; *CIL* 9.838, 1232, 1298, 2485, 4441; *CIL* 14.956, 1110; *AE* 1972, 642, *AE* 1976, 181, *AE* 1977, 38; *Suppl. It.* 2003, 153, n. 41 [restored], *Suppl. It.* 2003, 207, n. 118, *Suppl. It.* 2003, 260, n. 204; *Epigraphica* 2014, 443–445, n. 5; Stelluti (1997: 334).

²⁸ Treggiari (1981: 45, 50); cf. Rawson (1974: 293–299), with a sample of 270. Because *contubernium* might be formed between two slaves or between a slave and a free person (Paulus, *Sent.* 2.19.6), the presence of the term in an inscription does not prove that both parties had been slaves. For the purposes of the current discussion, I follow Treggiari (1981: 63–69, Appendix, "Contubernales and children"), but note that her criteria for status identification are conservative, particularly regarding Greek *cognomina*.

²⁹ Mouritsen (2005; 2011a: 286–289).



Figure 8 Illustration of excavations on the Via Appia, showing the epitaph of A. Memmius Clarus (bottom right); Rome, first century CE.

Photo: Archive of the British School at Rome.

fashion. In this epitaph, A. Memmius Urbanus commemorates his friend and fellow freedman (*collibertus*) with the following words (fig. 8):³⁰

A(ulo) Memmio Claro | A(ulus) Memmius Urbanus | conliberto idem
consorti | carissimo sibi | inter me et te sanctissime mi | conliberte nullum
unquam | disiurgium fuisse conscius | sum mihi hoc quoque titulo | superos et
inferos testor deos | unā me tecum congressum | in venalicio una domo liberos |
esse factos neque ullus unquam | nos diunxisset nisi hic tuus | fatalis dies.

To A. Memmius Clarus, by A. Memmius Urbanus, to his dearest fellow freedman and comrade. That between me and you, my most esteemed fellow freedman, there was never a quarrel, I am aware. And with this epitaph I call to witness the gods above and below that I met you in the slave market; that we were made free under one roof; nor did any day tear us apart except for this one, the day of your death.

Rather than diminish the fact that he and Clarus had been slaves, Urbanus commemorates their long history together, even mentioning the

³⁰ CIL 6.22355a = ILS 8432; Geraci (1975: n. 22).

slave market where they met. Their relationship, he takes care to point out, continued after manumission and was interrupted only by Clarus' death. Although slavery's benchmarks are present, Urbanus uses friendship as an encompassing framework to describe how their lives intertwined.

This epitaph contains a unique level of detail but may serve as a guide to less elaborate inscriptions that attest the continuity of a bond between fellow slaves by using *conservus* to describe a relationship that had survived manumission. In most cases, one of the parties remained in captivity at the time of commemoration.³¹ As a baseline, consider this *cubicularius* who belonged to an imperial freedman and was honored with a stele that reflects the significance of social bonds formed between fellow slaves:³²

Cerdoni Luperci | Aug(usti) l(iberti) | cubiculario | vixit annis LV | Ampliata
fidei | conservo loco | empto de suo.

To Cerdo, slave of Lupercus, imperial freedman, a *cubicularius*, who lived for 55 years. Ampliata purchased this burial with her own money, for her loyal fellow slave.

Conservus was an accurate title for Cerdo because he had yet to join the ranks of the imperial freedmen. Ampliata's choice of the term emphasizes their shared servile status more than *amicus* or *coniunx* would have.³³ The selection of *fidelis* as a descriptive epithet supports this reading and suggests, albeit generically, that Cerdo's personal qualities helped to support their connection. Collegiality among fellow slaves was not limited to the imperial service, and similar expressions can be found in epitaphs originating from private households, even in cases where a relationship persisted after the manumission of one or both parties.³⁴

Two epitaphs from the *familia* of the Egrilii at Ostia demonstrate the significance of deviations from the regular use of *conservus*. A freedwoman named Egrilia Tyche commissioned a simple stele for a slave named Hilarus, whom she calls her "fellow slave."³⁵ In the second epitaph – carved

³¹ *CIL* 6.4402, 5935, 7027, 9253, 14188, 14697, 16304, 17776, 18565, 19315, 19871, 19991, 22606, 27790, 29114, 38878; *CIL* 9.1232, 2485, 4441; *CIL* 14.956, 1110; *AE* 1972, 642, *AE* 1977, 38; *Suppl. It.* 2003, 207, n. 118; Stelluti (1997: 334).

³² *CIL* 10.695 (Surrentum, first century CE).

³³ For the combination of *conservus* with *coniunx*, see e.g. *CIL* 6.4350, 4719, 5477, 11859, 25265, 26087, 36304; *AE* 1988, 124.

³⁴ Spouses are attested in e.g. *CIL* 6.16304 (*conservae bene merenti et dulcissimae*); 6.14697 (*conservae sodali et amice coniugi*); cf. *CIL* 6.19871 (*conservo carissimo*), in which the precise nature of the relationship is unknown. See Flory (1978: 83) on the difficulty of surmising whether *conservi* or *colliberti* were married without additional information.

³⁵ *CIL* 14.1110 (late first to early second century CE).



Figure 9 Cinerary urn of Egrilia Felicitas; Ostia, second century CE.

Photo: Museo Nazionale Romano alle Terme di Diocleziano, su concessione del Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo – Soprintendenza Speciale per il Colosseo, il Museo Nazionale Romano e l'Area archeologica di Roma.

on the lid of a cinerary urn that portrays the outcome of the contest for the arms of Achilles – this status differential is reversed (fig. 9):³⁶

D(is) M(anibus) | Egriliae Felicitati | vixit annis XXVIII | Carpophorus
cons|servos (*sic*).

To the divine shades. To Egrilia Felicitas, who lived for 28 years;
Carpophorus, her fellow slave [made this].

Carpophorus' use of *conservus* to describe his relationship to the deceased establishes a link between Felicitas' freedom at the time of her death and the time she spent in captivity. This language grounds Felicitas' biography in a personal relationship that was formed in servitude but lasted beyond the

³⁶ CIL 14.956 (second half of the second century CE) = Sinn (1987: 246, n. 637) = MNR Inv. 325.

point of manumission. Although it is possible that Felicitas was freed on her deathbed, this practice is best attested for children, and all other freed *conservi* whose ages at death are known lived into adulthood.³⁷ Moreover, freedmen commemorate “fellow slaves” just as often as slaves describe freed colleagues in these terms.

In a handful of cases, both *conservi* had been manumitted when the epitaph was commissioned. One of these inscriptions explicitly attests a married couple through inclusion of the phrase “with whom she lived” (*cum quo vixit*), and the rest commemorate male–female pairs who may have been spouses, although it is impossible to know for sure.³⁸ A second-century stele from Venusia preserves the names of three individuals from the household of the Seppii; the deceased woman, whose *nomen* suggests freed status, is commemorated by a man with the same *nomen* as his “fellow slave,” presumably to stress that their relationship had originated in captivity. The conjugal nature of their bond is further suggested by the presence of a second male commemorator, represented only by a single name and identified as the son of the deceased.³⁹ If the son’s nomenclature indicates that he remained in captivity, whereas his parents had attained their freedom, the impetus to trace the marriage back to its origins may have been particularly strong.

Roman masters likely encouraged unions between enslaved men and women to promote order and procreation, but these relationships were not legally recognized.⁴⁰ Studies of *contubernales* from the city of Rome have demonstrated that most couples had been prevented from entering a legal marriage because of the servile status of one or both partners at the time the union was formed.⁴¹ For my purposes, the most interesting type of *contubernium* is that attested between former slaves, who could easily have used words like *coniunx*, *vir*, *maritus*, or *uxor* to claim legitimacy for themselves and their offspring. Marriages that began in slavery automatically became legal if both parties were freed and willingly maintained their union.⁴² Nor would Junian Latins have been required

³⁷ Eight of the thirty-two epitaphs that attest slave–freed or freed–freed *conservus* relationships include an age at death; those ages range from 20 to 80.

³⁸ Married couples: *Epigraphica* 2014, 443–445, n. 5; cf. *CIL* 6.13575; *AE* 1976, 181; *Suppl. It.* 2003, 260, n. 204, *Suppl. It.* 2003, 153, n. 41.

³⁹ *Suppl. It.* 2003, 260, n. 204.

⁴⁰ On the encouragement of slave unions by masters, see Varro, *Rust.* 2.10.6; Columella, *Rust.* 1.8; Bradley (1994: 50–51). On natural reproduction as a source of slaves, see Scheidel (2005; 2011: 306–308).

⁴¹ Rawson (1974); Treggiari (1981).

⁴² Treggiari (1981: 58–59) on *Dig.* 23.3.39 pr.

to commemorate their spouses as *contubernales*, since even slaves used *coniunx* and other “respectable” terms, despite the imprecision involved.⁴³ Freed husbands and wives who refer to their partners as *contubernales* may therefore be understood to have chosen this term to shape their commemorative personae.

The data from Rome suggest that the term *contubernalis* was used most frequently by members of the *familia Caesaris* or by domestic personnel in aristocratic households, rather than by freed artisans and shopkeepers. Large *familiae* may have provided slaves with increased opportunities to form and maintain conjugal relationships.⁴⁴ At the same time, after manumission, identifying one’s marriage as *contubernium* conferred a certain amount of prestige, as well as a sense of stability. An example from the first century CE helps to illustrate how *contubernalis* might emphasize the endurance of freedmen’s conjugal relationships:⁴⁵

D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) | M(arco) Lollio Saturninae [(iberto)] | Principi amico fidissimo | qui vixit annis LVIII et | Lolliae Saturninae [(ibertae)] | Urbanae contubernal(i) eius [et] | Lolliae Saturninae lib(ertae) | Methes sorori eius Lollia | (*mulieris*) [(iberta)] Galatea parentib(us) caris|simis fecit permissu Ur|sionis contubernal(is) mei.

Sacred to the divine shades. To Marcus Lollius Princeps, freedman of Saturnina, a most loyal friend who lived 58 years; and to Lollia Urbana, freedwoman of Saturnina, his *contubernalis*; and to Lollia Methe, freedwoman of Saturnina, his sister. Lollia Galatea, freedwoman of a woman, made this for her dearest parents, by permission of Ursio, my *contubernalis*.

Although the identity of Lollia Saturnina is debated, she is generally agreed to have belonged to the same family as Lollia Paulina, who was married to Caligula briefly and reappeared as a candidate for marriage to Claudius in 49.⁴⁶ Two pairs of *contubernales* from her servile staff are attested in this inscription, one pair comprising a freedman and freedwoman, another a freedwoman and slave. The commemorator, whose own union was still *contubernium*, applied the term to her parents’ relationship, which by that point would have qualified as legal marriage. This strategy allows Galatea to assert continuity not only for Princeps and Urbana’s conjugal bond, but for the entire family, which had managed to withstand the pressures of slavery and manumission.

⁴³ E.g. *CIL* 10.1734; other examples cited by Bradley (1994: 49).

⁴⁴ Treggiari (1981: 61).

⁴⁵ *CIL* 6.21473a.

⁴⁶ See Kavanagh (2001).

Work and *Collegia*

Personal relationships were not the only potential source of coherence in ex-slaves' biographical narratives. Involvement in a profession or guild provided some *liberti* with an encompassing framework in which to represent their progress through life.⁴⁷ This approach would have been particularly useful for skilled workers who advanced from low-level positions to managerial roles, or even to ownership of their own businesses. It is clearly satirized by Petronius in scenes where Trimalchio represents his life course as it progressed from captivity to freedom.⁴⁸ Domestic and administrative personnel who continued to perform roughly the same tasks for their patrons as they had during enslavement may have stood to benefit from representing their work as a unifying motif.⁴⁹ In monuments commissioned for members of the *familia Caesaris*, most ex-slaves appear with only their highest rank, rather than with a full *cursus*, although exceptions can be found in which multiple posts are listed.⁵⁰ Moreover, belonging to the emperor's extensive, prestigious, and increasingly bureaucratic *familia* may have provided a source of continuity in itself.

Among slaves and freedmen from private households, professional gradations are not always visible epigraphically, in part because some occupational titles could describe an individual over the course of his entire career.⁵¹ Epigraphic studies have shown that jobs are attested somewhat more frequently among slaves than among freedmen, especially in *columbaria*.⁵² This pattern suggests a certain amount of discontinuity in the significance of professional titles from one status group to another. However, for the many *liberti* whose jobs are attested, release from captivity neither negated the importance of work nor dissolved the relationships that enslaved labor created. For wealthy ex-slaves, work became an avenue not just to wealth, but to civic standing and political participation.⁵³ Belonging to a professional network or workshop could also provide meaningful links

⁴⁷ See Petersen (2006: 3); Joshel (1992: 59–60, 82, 144).

⁴⁸ See above, pp. 14–15, 85.

⁴⁹ For occupational titles, see Joshel (1992: esp. 69–71).

⁵⁰ Weaver (1972: 224); Leppin (1996: 78); cf. e.g. *CIL* 6.1887, 8604, 8608.

⁵¹ For instance, both slave and free *paedagogi* are found in e.g. *CIL* 5.3157; 6.4718, 6327, 6328, 6329, 6330, 6331, 7290, 9748, 9749, 9752, 33392, 37812; 10.1943, 1944, 6562, 8129; 11.5440; AE 1985, 169, AE 1983, 298, AE 1988, 424, AE 1991, 248; cf. *CIL* 6.9739 (freed *supra paedagogos*). For variations in title and status between the domestic and public spheres for certain professions, including tailors and builders, see Joshel (1992: 94–98).

⁵² See above, p. 51–52.

⁵³ Joshel (1992: 82).

to one's life before manumission; "even if shared work characterized the servile past, it is the salient element from that past that commemorates them at death."⁵⁴ In such cases, work may have served a dual purpose, both to establish unity in the freed life course and to provide a basis for the deceased's commemorative persona by conveying *industria* and related virtues. While only a small subset of Roman freedmen adopted this strategy, those who did evoke work as a link to the past demonstrate an ability to appeal to frameworks other than the ideology of slave-owning.

The trade guilds and burial societies (*collegia*) that were common features of Roman towns and cities may also have provided a thread of constancy within the freed life course by institutionalizing professional and social networks and by providing a structure for upward mobility.⁵⁵ Juridical sources make clear that slaves could enroll in *collegia* with their master's permission, and most people who joined under these conditions would likely have retained their membership when and if they became free.⁵⁶ This phenomenon occurred with sufficient frequency to be addressed in the by-laws of a second-century CE burial club, which instituted a rule that "any slave from this *collegium* who has been made free must donate an amphora of good wine."⁵⁷ Such a donation would have reinforced the freedman's position within the organization, even as it marked a change in legal status that ultimately derived from the authority of his master.⁵⁸ In this sense, the *collegium* provided a setting where the transition from *servus* to *libertus* could be both acknowledged and absorbed by a corporate body, despite manumission's reliance on the will of the slave-owner.

By the same token, it is unlikely that the **Augustales* were a ready source of biographical unity for freedmen who had become wealthy enough to join that organization, since membership would have followed manumission; slaves were generally associated with the *Lares Augusti*.⁵⁹ In civic and

⁵⁴ Joshel (1992: 133), with specific reference to fellow freedmen attested in *CIL* 6.33920; on such networks, see also Flory (1978: 81).

⁵⁵ On the spectrum of social ranks in *collegia*, and on the opportunities for acquiring prestige that these organizations provided to individuals of varying status, see especially Tran (2006b); also see Bond (2016) on specific professions.

⁵⁶ *Dig.* 47.22.3.2.

⁵⁷ *CIL* 14.2112 (Lanuvium) = *ILS* 7212 = *FIRA* 3.35: *ut quisquis servus ex hoc collegio liber factus fuerit, is dare debet vini [bo] | ni amphoram.*

⁵⁸ Cf. *AE* 1929, 161, a collegial register that appears to leave space for the addition of *praenomen* and *nomen*. Both texts are interpreted insightfully by Tran (2006b: 63–64) in light of the tension between personal dependence and participation in a *collegium*. My point here is simply that trade guilds may have been a source of biographical continuity, even as they marked transitions in legal status.

⁵⁹ Beard, North, and Price (1998: 357); Scheid (2003: 144); see Bömer (1981: 38) on freed *magistri* and slave *ministri* associated with the cult at Rome.

burial inscriptions, commemorators of freed **Augustales* tend to focus on achievements after manumission, including municipal honors and acts of euergetism, as well as the office itself.⁶⁰ To be sure, some freed **Augustales* found ways to represented a connection to the servile past, for example by commemorating their spouse as a *contubernalis*.⁶¹ But this type of strategy appeals to private relationships, rather than to institutional membership, which in the case of the **Augustales* was reserved for free persons, whether manumitted or (in some cases) freeborn.⁶²

Creative uses of professional organizations also appear in private monuments from Rome and Italy, albeit with limited frequency. In one inscription from the capital, a successful charioteer named Epaphroditus is commemorated by his wife, Beia Felicula:⁶³

D(is) M(anibus) | Epaphroditus | agitator f(actionis) r(ussatae) | vic(it)
CLXXVIII et | at purpureum | liber vic(it) VIII | Beia Felicula | f(ecit)
coniugi suo | merenti.

To the divine shades of Epaphroditus; as a charioteer of the Reds, he won 178 victories; and having become a member of the Purples as a free man, he won 8 more. Beia Felicula set up this monument for her spouse, who is deserving.

The deceased is identified only by his slave name, Epaphroditus, despite the fact that the inscription demonstrates his freed status. This choice of nomenclature foregrounds his activities as a slave, and with excellent reason; during that time, as a member of the Reds, he won 178 races. Later, upon manumission, he became a Purple and won only eight more victories before he died.⁶⁴ As a biographical narrative, this epitaph acknowledges Epaphroditus' transition from slave to free but ties those phases of his life together by means of his involvement in the *circus* and, most importantly, of the triumphs he gained in that field. Although he moved from one faction to another, the broader network of organized racing teams provides a frame for his life. These types of corporate body gave select *liberti* a way to construct the life course as a coherent whole, rather than as discrete phases of life strongly divided by manumission.

⁶⁰ E.g. *CIL* 10.4760 (freeborn son); cf. 112, 5929, 1209).

⁶¹ E.g. *CIL* 5.3354, 3393, 4465; cf. 10.6114.

⁶² On the presence of freedmen, *incerti*, and freeborn in the record for **Augustales* in different regions of Italy, see above p. 43, n. 45.

⁶³ *CIL* 6.10062 = *ILS* 5282 (probably Flavian); see McCrum and Woodhead (1961: 151, no. 517).

⁶⁴ On Domitian's addition of the Gold and Purple factions, see Suet. *Dom.* 7.1; Dio Cass. 67.4.4. Slaves' possible participation in the fan-club aspect of the *factiones* is attested by Petron. *Sat.* 70.10.

Votive Dedications

Cult offered another possible source of biographical unity for slaves who had been granted their freedom. Although a detailed account of slaves' religious practices lies beyond the scope of this study, it is worth noting that organized cults, like other types of collective, frequently integrated a range of social groups, including slaves and *liberti*; as Bömer argued, there is very little evidence for what one might call "slave religion" in the Roman world.⁶⁵ With their master's permission, slaves could participate in the worship of a particular deity and would likely remain devoted to the same god when and if they became free. Ex-slaves who cultivated a divinity with this level of commitment would therefore have benefitted from the chance to attach biographical narratives to that relationship and to the rituals that sustained it.

The essence of this phenomenon is contained in the formula *servus vovit, liber solvit*, or "he made the vow as a slave and fulfilled it as a free man." This expression and its variants appear on several votive inscriptions found throughout Italy and Gaul, often in abbreviated form.⁶⁶ The formula's geographical range is matched by a chronological span from republic to empire, and the divinity held in receipt of the vow also varied considerably. Hercules, Apollo, Bona Dea, Mercury, and Belenus are all attested, as is the cult of the Lares. Despite the small number of extant examples, the phrase seems to have enjoyed a long lifespan and relatively widespread usage, in addition to its flexibility with respect to the identity of the god being worshipped.

A marble statue base which L. Coelius Surillio dedicated to Mercury in the territory of Apta is perhaps the clearest and most straightforward case:⁶⁷

Mercurio | L(ucius) Coe(lius) Surillio | ser(vus) v(ovit), liber s(olvit).

To Mercury; L. Coelius Surillio made the vow as a slave and fulfilled it as a free man.

In a similar format, though no longer extant, is a pair of republican inscriptions commissioned by C. Marcius Alexander, freedman of Gaius, and attributed by Mommsen to Puteoli.⁶⁸ Alexander made a vow to

⁶⁵ Bömer (1981: v. 1); North (2012); Beard, North, and Price (1998: 24–25).

⁶⁶ This corpus contains two inscriptions from Rome (6.30953 and 30688); one from the territory of Apta (12.1081); and one from Puteoli (10.1569). Inscriptions reconstructed on less secure grounds originate from Cora (10.6514); Alesia (13.11241); and Aquileia (5.737).

⁶⁷ *CIL* 12.1081 = *ILN* 4 Apt 76.

⁶⁸ *CIL* 10.1569.

Hercules while a slave and followed through on his promise after he had been freed.⁶⁹ Comparable inscriptions from the city of Rome include a dedication to Bona Dea by Q. Mucius Trypho, freedman of Quintus, also of republican date.⁷⁰ In a second example from the capital, C. Epidius, freedman of Gaius, records a gift he gave to the Lares.⁷¹

Interpretations of this formula sometimes assume that the freedman had asked specifically for manumission.⁷² The primary reason for attesting a status change would therefore have been to convey the terms of the vow. While logical, this reading does not always fit seamlessly with the evidence. In the first place, there was an easier way to convey the same information, namely by including the words *ob libertatem* (“on account of his freedom”).⁷³ Moreover, nothing in the phrase *servus vovit, liber solvit* explicitly makes such a claim; although divine favor would have been helpful in furthering a slave’s hopes for manumission, not all *liberti* who include the formula in a votive inscription can be assumed to be thanking the god specifically for their receipt of freedom.

An alternative explanation is suggested by the dedication of Q. Samicius Successus in fulfillment of a vow to Lake Benacus and another deity, whose name has since been eroded (fig. 10):⁷⁴

[...]elo et lac(ui) | Benaco | Successus Q(uinti) | Samici Mirini | v(otum)
s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito) | ‘Q(uintus) Samicius Suc[cessus]s iter(um)’.

To [?] and Lake Benacus; Successus, slave of Q. Samicius Mirinus, dispensed his vow willingly and justly. Q. Samicius Successus repeated the dedication.

The nomenclature in lines three and four indicates that the commemorator was still a slave when he made and fulfilled his vow the first time; he is “Successus, slave of Q. Samicius Mirinus,” whose name appears in the genitive. A line added later at the bottom of the inscription says that he repeated the dedication (*iter*). The use of *tria nomina*, Q. Samicius Successus, demonstrates that he had been freed by this stage. Since the purpose of the initial vow could not have been manumission, Successus

⁶⁹ (A) *Herculei | sacrum | C(aius) Marci(us) C(ai) l(ibertus) Alex(ander) fecit servos | vovit liber solvit.*
(B) *Herculei | sacrum | C(aius) Marci(us) C(ai) l(ibertus) Alex(ander) | dat.*

⁷⁰ *CIL* 1².972 = 6,30688 = *ILS* 3491 = *ILLRP* 56: *Q(uintus) Mucius Q(uinti) [l(ibertus)] | Trupho ser(vus) | vovit leiber solv(it) | l(ibens) m(erito) | Bonae Deae | sacr(um);* see Brouwer (1989: no. 15).

⁷¹ *CIL* 6.30953: *C(aius) Epidi(us) C(ai) l(ibertus) ... | Laribus [quas] | vovit se[rvus] imagines | aureas po[ndo] | ☉ IIII liber s[olvit].*

⁷² Along lines suggested by Veyne (1964: 33); Dorsey (1992: 109); Bruun (2014: 616).

⁷³ E.g. *CIL* 6.663 = 14,3456 = *ILS* 3526.

⁷⁴ *CIL* 5.3998 (Brixia).



Figure 10 Dedication to Lake Benacus and another deity by Q. Samicius Successus;
Brixia, first century CE.
Photo: Museo Lapidario Maffeiiano.

must have had another reason for repeating his dedication and recording that act on the same stone.

A republican inscription from Cora also militates against the assumption that dedicators used the phrase *servus vovit, liber solvit* uniformly to express the contents of their original prayer. In this text, a group of priests (*magistri*) records a joint dedication to Mens Bona:⁷⁵

[Mentei Bo]nae serveis contul(erunt) HS | [---] Φ Φ Φ ⊥ mag(istri) X |
[---]ded(erunt) HS V | [---]us Saleivi P(ubli) s(ervos) leiber coeravit |
[---]Timotheus Poplili L(uci) M(arci) s(ervos) Anti | [---]us pop(uli) s(ervos)

⁷⁵ *CIL* 10.6514 = I² 1510 = ILS 3819 (late republic); trans. adapted from Warmington; see Weiss (2004: 194).

leiber coeravit | [---]Petro Furi L(uci) s(ervos) Ra(---) Furi L(uci) P(ubli)
G(ai) s(ervos) | [---]Antiochus Utili Gn(aei) s(ervos) leiber coeravit.

To Mens Bona. Slaves contributed ... sesterces ... 3055 given by the ten *magistri* ... gave five sesterces ... [?]us, slave of P. Saleivius, superintended when free. Timotheus, slave of L. and M. Publilius. Anti[ochus?] ... a public slave, superintended when free ... Petro, slave of L. Furius; Ra[?], slave of L., P., and C. Furius ... Antiochus, slave of Cn. Utilius, superintended when free.

The names of three commemorators are followed by the letter “s” and the phrase *leiber coeravit*. If the “s” is an abbreviation for *servus*, the text contains a variation of the formula *servus vovit, liber solvit*, thus indicating a change of status for these individuals. The fact that they appear on the same stone with *magistri* who were still slaves makes it unlikely that they decided to include this information as a way of thanking Mens Bona for their freedom *per se*, especially in the context of a collective dedication.

If *servus vovit, liber solvit* was not simply another way of saying that a vow was made by a slave who wanted to attain his freedom and fulfilled as an expression of gratitude for the god’s assistance, then the formula’s rhetorical purpose requires further thought. One obvious effect of juxtaposing *servus* and *liber* is to advertise upward mobility. In this regard, one is reminded that legal status did provide ex-slaves with a basis for constructing positive personae, even if freedom and the rewards of citizenship cannot be assumed to have outweighed other sources of prestige. In addition, this votive formula shows that manumission could accompany the citation of alternative frameworks in defining the structure of an ex-slave’s life course. When fulfilling a vow he had made as a slave, a newly minted *libertus* would have encountered perhaps his first opportunity to commemorate this important transition in the context of an ongoing relationship with the deity to whose cult he belonged.

This reading finds support in the votive activities of freeborn citizens who made a vow at one stage of their career and fulfilled it at another. Not least among these is the architectural dedication on the inner gate at Eleusis, an edifice which Ap. Claudius Pulcher vowed to Ceres and Proserpina as consul in 54 BCE, which he began after being hailed *imperator*, and which he left to be completed by his heirs.⁷⁶ In this monumental text, the phrase

⁷⁶ CIL 1².775 = CIL 3.547 = ILS 4041 = ILLRP 401: [Ap(pius) Claudi]us Ap(pi)f(ilius) Pulche(r) propylum Cere[ri] | et Proserpi]nae co(n)s(ul) vovit [im]perato[r] coepit | Pulcher Clau]dius et Rex Mar[c]ius fec[er]un[t] ex testam(ento)].

consul vovit, imperator coepit maps Pulcher's political success in terms of a change in his title, even though he received the latter appellation as governor of Cilicia, not as consul. At a more modest social echelon, a *duovir* from Achaia fulfilled a vow to Stata Mater that he had made as aedile.⁷⁷ In both dedications, the fulfillment of a religious duty provides an opportunity to advertise successive steps in one's public life. The same applies to votive inscriptions that use the formula *miles vovit, veteranus solvit* or comparable references to promotion.⁷⁸ Within the servile population, a man named Pudens in northern Italy records that he made a vow as *contrascriptor* and fulfilled it as an *arcarius*.⁷⁹

While important, such affirmations of legal and social advancement reflect only one aspect of the life course described by these freedmen in their votive dedications. The marked contrast between *servus* and *liber* is balanced by the continuity between *vovere*, on the one hand, and *solvere*, on the other – that is, between two acts that together constituted a single process. Having made a vow to a god and received a favorable outcome, the worshipper was required to fulfill his original promise. The logical progression from *vovere* to *solvere* draws as much strength from the principles of Rome's dedicatory conventions as the divide between slave and free draws from social hierarchies. In this respect, the overall impact of the formula is to articulate a tension between status, which changes, and participation in a cult, which stays constant.

Freedmen like Surillio and Alexander may have found the expression *servus vovit, liber solvit* attractive not merely because they wanted to indicate their transition from one status group to another. They may also have been keen to draw attention to the continuity provided by their relationship with a particular deity in the interest of presenting their lives in a coherent format. As a source of continuity, the exchange between god and worshipper stood in contrast to that between master and slave. Like domestic bonds and membership in other types of collective, religious cult helped to tie these freedmen's biographies together without direct recourse to the institution of slavery or to the ideological principles on which the slave system operated.

⁷⁷ CIL 3.500 = 3.7256 = ILS 3312: *M(arcus) Lollius | Epinicy(s) | aed(ilis) vovit | Ilvir | dec(urionum) decr(eto) | Statae Matr(i) | de sua pecun(ia) | posuit sacrum*. It would also be possible to restore *aed-* as *aedem*, however.

⁷⁸ E.g. CIL 3.3484 (Aquincum); 11.3057 (Horta); 14.3545 (Tibur).

⁷⁹ CIL 5.7213.

Birthdays

The commemorative strategies discussed thus far were rooted in social, economic, and religious conditions in which slaves and freedmen defined their life stories. Other *liberti* appealed to more abstract frameworks when faced with the problem of how best to relate the past to the present. Citing a birthday (*dies natalis*) in the context of a burial monument established coherence by enunciating a point of origin for a life that had reached its conclusion. This day was also a popular choice for the enactment of ongoing civic benefactions, such as feasts and the distribution of cash handouts (*sportulae*).⁸⁰ While birthdays also had implications for status, they created a sense of order in epitaphs by depicting biographical narratives in terms of a chronological progression. Birthdays also located one's life within the official Roman calendar, which was itself a developing construct. After the Julian reform, the Romans' interest in birthdays gained new significance within a 365-day system that created an identity of days from year to year.⁸¹ Appreciation for the cyclical dimensions of human life tapped into a broader discourse about the nature of time and political authority; concomitantly, birthdays provided individuals with a way to structure their personal histories.

The private aspects of the *dies natalis* are well attested by the rituals it involved. Foremost among these was the cultivation of one's *genius* through incense and other offerings, which were accompanied by vows for the cult's renewal the following year.⁸² Historians have debated the precise character of the *genius*, which some sources represent as an extension of the self, others as a sort of guardian angel. The ambiguity of the *genius* has rightly been stressed, "for it is his essential nature to be both a part of a man as well as an external deity." Celebration of birthdays, particularly among clients and patrons, worked to solidify social relationships in a ritual context. Equally important was the birthday's intense concentration on the individual, whether in the flesh or through his *genius*.⁸³ Not knowing

⁸⁰ Duncan-Jones (1982: 138–139); Donahue (2004: 131–132); Champlin (1991: 164–165). As Duncan-Jones points out, most of the evidence for this practice comes from the second and third centuries CE. Examples from Italy include, for probable freedmen: *CIL* 9.1618 (Beneventum, with freeborn son); 14.367 (Ostia); 14.2793 (Gabii). Cf. bequests by freeborn individuals attested in *CIL* 2.1174; 10.4643, 4736, 5654, 5853; 11.379, 4391.

⁸¹ Feeney (2007: 156–159).

⁸² Argetsinger (1992), quotation from p. 186.

⁸³ This phenomenon might be continued after death in the form of graveside cult performed on the deceased's *dies natalis*, on which practice see Toynbee (1971: 63).

one's date of birth excluded one from participating fully in such rites or from consulting a horoscope.⁸⁴

For slaves and freedmen, celebrating a birthday would have heightened the problem of defining oneself in relation to the community. To celebrate a *dies natalis*, one needed to have precise knowledge of one's date of birth, and the conditions of servitude denied this to many. To cite a well-known comparandum from the U.S. South, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* begins:⁸⁵

I have no accurate knowledge of my age, never having seen any authentic record containing it. By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep their slaves thus ignorant. I do not remember to have ever met a slave who could tell of his birthday. They seldom came nearer to it than planting-time, harvest-time, cherry-time, spring-time, or fall-time. A want of information concerning my own was a source of unhappiness to me even during childhood. The white children could tell their ages. I could not tell why I ought to be deprived of the same privilege.

Douglass tried to estimate the time of his birth and eventually settled on February 1817. In need of greater specificity, he adopted the 14th as his birthday, because he remembered his mother calling him "little Valentine"; in old age, he may have received word from his former owner's great-granddaughter that the estate records contained an entry of his birth in "Feb'y 1818."⁸⁶ Even so, Douglass' striking attempts to counteract this gap in his basic self-knowledge speak to the severity of the difficulties it raised.

No such testimony from an ancient slave or *libertus* has survived, but similar deprivations were likely for captives or foundlings sold on the open market. In a standard list of 154 Egyptian papyri that record sales of slaves, only twenty-six cite the slave's age; and four of these give an approximate figure.⁸⁷ Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* depicts an auction scene in which prospective buyers try to guess Lucius' age from his teeth, and the auctioneer uses flippant humor to distract from his ignorance on this point.⁸⁸ Sellers at the slave market were legally required to display on placards any diseases or defects, such as a history of punishment or escape, and to identify slaves' ethnicity (*natio*); as far as these sources indicate, statements of age were not compulsory.⁸⁹ Against this background, the

⁸⁴ See Cramer (1996).

⁸⁵ Douglass (1845: 15).

⁸⁶ See Preston (1980: 31–34).

⁸⁷ Straus (2004: 262–264); total number from Appendix 2, 344–349; cf. Bradley (1978).

⁸⁸ Apul. *Met.* 8.23–24. See Bradley (2000).

⁸⁹ Gell. *NA* 4.2.1; *Dig.* 21.1.31.21.

humblest members of the slave and freed population cannot be expected to have known how old they were, let alone to pinpoint their birthday in the Roman calendar.

Slaves born in the household or especially favored by their masters may have been in a better position to know and to celebrate their *dies natalis*. One thinks of Trimalchio's *dispensator*, Cinnamus, who is angry at another servant for having permitted the theft of a cloak that had been a birthday present from a "client."⁹⁰ This man's pride in his status within the domestic hierarchy finds expression not just in his mimicry of the elite role of patron, but more specifically in his receipt of a birthday gift from a dependent.⁹¹ Trimalchio's obsession with his own birthday is evident from his description of an appetizer modeled after the Zodiac.⁹² Perhaps also relevant in this context is an epigram in which Martial chides a certain Clytus for celebrating eight birthdays per year in order to amass as many presents as possible.⁹³ If Clytus' Greek *cognomen* connotes a servile background, his perceived self-importance aligns with that of Trimalchio and his steward in Petronius' novel.⁹⁴

The provision of a precise age – that is, in years, months, days, and even hours in some instances – was most prevalent for those who died young, perhaps because this format had special poignancy when a lifespan had been cut short, but also because commemorators of small children were more likely to possess accurate information than were commemorators of older people.⁹⁵ Age-rounding to multiples of five or ten was exceedingly common for adults, especially among low-status groups, which included slaves and *liberti*.⁹⁶ Rounding did not necessarily mean that commemorators were unaware of the deceased's actual age, and evidence from diverse sources in Egypt has shown that the medium or context in which such data were reported affected the level of detail.⁹⁷ However, discrepancies between elite and low-status commemorators of Latin funerary inscriptions probably reflect at least some decline in age-awareness as the degree of illiteracy increased. Where birthdays are concerned, the occurrence of adult ages in increments of five or ten years that also include a number of months

⁹⁰ Petron. *Sat.* 30.8–9.

⁹¹ Verg. *Ecl.* 3.76 has Damoetas sing: *meus est natalis*; on the historical value, see Fitzgerald (2000: 71).

⁹² Petron. *Sat.* 35, 39.

⁹³ On Greek versus Roman modes of celebration, see Feeney (2007: 148, and n. 76).

⁹⁴ Mart. *Ep.* 8.64; Garrido-Hory (1981: 64). Martial is playing with a literary form, but that does not preclude his making a social allusion as well. For the name Clytus, see Solin (1996: *ad loc.*).

⁹⁵ Laurence and Trifilò (2012).

⁹⁶ See especially Duncan-Jones (1977; 1979; 1990: 79–92).

⁹⁷ Scheidel (1996a: 53–91).

and days suggests further that commemorators might know and wish to convey a *dies natalis* but not a precise age in years.⁹⁸

These patterns indicate that age-awareness varied according to status, among other social and geographic factors, but also that the precision of ages reported was motivated by cultural forces. In the case of slaves and freedmen, I would argue, including the deceased's precise age or birthday capitalized on these wider phenomena by signaling access to biographical information that enslavement denied to so many. Moreover, in funereal settings, a birthday fixed the beginning of the commemorand's life in the annual cycle, even in the process of marking his death. These two points formed the outermost frame of the biography being presented, subsuming changes in career, status, geographical location, even marriage and procreation. For slaves and *liberti*, using the Roman calendrical system to organize a life story would perhaps have conveyed the amount of privilege that allowed them to participate in this custom. From a different perspective, this temporal structure provided an alternative to the dominant model of the servile life course, a model which overwhelmingly focused on enslavement and manumission as moments of symbolic death and rebirth.

The commemoration of individuals who died on their birthday cuts to the heart of the issue.⁹⁹ The motif seems to have had fairly widespread appeal, above and beyond its relevance to the technicalities of funeral ritual.¹⁰⁰ In the absence of a rigid formula or standard abbreviation, commemorators used phrases like "he died on his birthday" (*decessit natali suo*), as well as the citation of identical dates.¹⁰¹ One example, from the city of Rome, was commissioned in honor of a girl named Philete, who died on her seventh birthday:¹⁰²

Dis Man(ibus) | Philete | Epitynchanus | Hesychi | dispensatoris
fisci castrensis | arcarius filiae | dulcissimae quae | vixit ann(is) VI obit |
natali suo intrans | annum septimum.

To the divine shades of Philete. Epitynchanus, treasurer of Hesychius, paymaster of the military treasury, made this for his sweetest daughter, who lived for six years and died on her birthday while entering her seventh year.

⁹⁸ Laes (2012: 105).

⁹⁹ E.g. *CIL* 10.2933 (slave, Cumae), 6740 (probable freedwoman, Antium), 4881 (freeborn, Venafrum); *CIL* 6.6182 = *CLE* 1150 (probable freeborn), 8517 (slave), 20320 (freed), 18153 (child of *liberti*); *CIL* 11.7856 (freeborn son of *libertus* and *ingenua*); *CIL* 14.1706 (freeborn son of *incertus*); cf. 6.16912 (freedwoman died on freed daughter's birthday).

¹⁰⁰ Some literary comparanda are noted by Feeney (2007: 148–149, 158–159); on the implications for graveside ritual, see Toynbee (1971: 63).

¹⁰¹ Variations in the Latin phrasing include *suo natali mortuus est*, *obit suo natali*, and *natali suo elatus*.

¹⁰² *CIL* 6.8517. The epitaph is probably Flavian, in which period this *fiscus* appeared at Rome. See Jones (1950: 27–28); Brunt (1966).

Like other inscriptions that mention the deceased's date of birth, this text reflects upon the status of the commemorator, Epitynchanus, and thus upon the status of his daughter. He was the *arcarius* of another slave, Hesychius, whose post as *dispensator* of the military treasury adds even greater prestige. Epitynchanus' concluding remark that Philete "died on her birthday while entering her seventh year" contributes another layer of meaning to this composition. Rather than defining the life course in terms of legal status, this commemorator uses the coincidence of his daughter's birthday and death-day to cast her life as a movement from one year to the next.¹⁰³

Applied to adult ex-slaves, the theme may have had even greater significance. A woman named Iulia Hilara, probably a freedwoman from the *familia Caesaris*, was commemorated by her son, C. Iulius Victorinus.¹⁰⁴ She lived for seventy-three years and died on her birthday (*suo natali mortua est*). Looking back across this respectable lifespan, Victorinus makes the primary feature of Hilara's biography a temporal, rather than a social, progression. While understandably rare in the epigraphic record, the correlation of birthday and death-day provided an opportunity for the commemorator not only to acknowledge the bitter irony of the human condition, but also to shift the monument's emphasis from legal status to the passage of time. The unity imposed by a chronological framework to some degree suppresses the rift created by manumission, although legal status is not completely obscured, but rather integrated with other themes.

Taken together, such features of the epigraphic record indicate an ability on the part of select *liberti* to draw on concepts other than the master–slave and patron–freedman relationships to produce coherent life narratives. For these ex-slaves, alternative social, economic, and cultural frameworks helped to connect the servile past to the free present; conjugal bonds seem to have offered a particularly apt source of unity, although it should be noted that familial relationships tend to be emphasized in Latin funerary commemoration overall. Nevertheless, strategies like the application of *contubernalis* to a legitimate union

¹⁰³ Parallels include *CIL* 10.4428 (fragmentary, *incertus*) and 5020 (*incerta*); 14.1706 (*ingenuus*). The importance of the birthday to slaves' autobiographies is perhaps reflected in the epitaph of a certain Saturnina from Cumae (*CIL* 10.2933): *D(is) M(anibus) | Saturninae | die Saturni | nata diem Satur|ni diem functam | vix(it) annis III | m(ensibus) V d(iebus) XX*. Her name's derivation from her birthday, which happened to coincide with her death-day, draws a close connection between these pieces of information.

¹⁰⁴ *CIL* 6.20320.

indicate that legal status was not the only way to measure an ex-slave's movement through life. Although manumission was undoubtedly an important transition, it interacted with other considerations to structure freedmen's biographies.

Biography and Political Change

For members of the Roman elite, the organization of biographical narratives related directly to the nature of the political system. Under the early principate, one area of concern became the *cursus honorum*, which provided a crucial, albeit limited, framework for ordering the life stories of male aristocrats. In the final sections of this chapter, I revisit the elite's engagement of freed culture from the perspective of biography and autobiography, broadly defined. These forms provide evidence for the cultural frameworks that structured the elite life course as it evolved between republic and empire. Against this background, representations of spiritual growth in the younger Seneca, Epictetus, and Paul indicate how philosophical and religious thought employed markers of individual progress that differed from military and political ones. Focusing on moments when spiritual development is expressed in terms of metaphorical slavery and liberation, I argue that these Stoic and early Christian authors adopted strategies comparable to those used by ex-slaves as they looked beyond the *cursus honorum* to identify other measures of continuity and change.

The redistribution of political authority under the principate affected the pillars of aristocratic self-definition by placing ranks, offices, and triumphal honors under the control of the emperor.¹⁰⁵ These trends had implications for biography and autobiography, because they entailed a reshaping of the conventional modes through which elite men were expected to organize their life stories. Commemoration among the Roman elite had traditionally rested on two core principles – ancestral lineage, which connected the deceased to the achievements of his predecessors, and the *cursus honorum*, which documented his service to the community on the basis of magistracies and military victories. These customs are epitomized by the display of *imagines* in aristocratic houses and at funereal processions, as well as by laudatory speeches and commemorative inscriptions like the Scipionic *elogia*.¹⁰⁶ Of course, it was possible to gain prominence by

¹⁰⁵ See above, pp. 55–56.

¹⁰⁶ Plin. *HN* 35.4–14; Polyb. 6.53–54; Flower (1996).

other means, including intellectual pursuits; Cicero, to name one famous example, states in a letter to L. Lucceius that the historian would achieve lasting fame along with his subject, a former consul.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, political and military activities remained a central component of aristocratic biographies, and the essential structure of the *cursus honorum* continued to provide senators with a means of self-representation while proliferating to other groups, including *equites* and the municipal elite.¹⁰⁸

The autobiographical writings of statesmen like Caesar and Cicero show that this category of literary text worked both to preserve one's *res gestae* and to enhance one's effectiveness in the competitive world of republican politics.¹⁰⁹ While biography does not seem to have taken shape as a genre at Rome until the first century BCE, early works in the field by Varro, Atticus, and Cornelius Nepos reflect an interest in documenting the origins and careers of illustrious men, in addition to explicating character traits that underlay their successes and failures.¹¹⁰ Atticus appears to have written a compendium of Roman magistrates and genealogical treatises that, in Nepos' view, brought great pleasure "to those who have some desire for knowledge of famous men (*clari viri*)."¹¹¹ These works, like inscriptions and other commemorative media, served both a mnemonic and an exemplary function. While Nepos included philosophers, poets, historians, and other cultural figures in *De Viris Illustribus*, as well as renowned military commanders, he explicitly justifies Atticus' decision not to seek public office and, in the case of Cato, opens with a description of that man's *cursus honorum*.¹¹²

As organizing principles of elite biography and autobiography, ancestral heritage and official titles identified the individual's location in the community through family ties and civic involvement. With the rise of monarchy, these frameworks necessarily adapted to a world in which imperial favor determined one's access to honor.¹¹³ The extent to which Augustus made his authority visible through inscriptions and

¹⁰⁷ Cic. *Fam.* 5.12.6; cf. Sall. *Cat.* 1–4, *Iug.* 1–4.

¹⁰⁸ See especially Eck (1984, 2009).

¹⁰⁹ Nicely summarized by Kraus (2005a: 253).

¹¹⁰ Nep. *Praef.* 1. Of course, late republican biographers' attention to figures from Greek history and the publication of Roman traditions to a wider audience show a more subtle treatment of the biographical genre than can be assessed here; see e.g. Momigliano (1993: 95–100).

¹¹¹ Nep. *Att.* 18; Plin. *HN* 35.2.11.

¹¹² Nep. *Att.* 6.2–3; *Cato* 1–2.

¹¹³ The shift in mores and definitions of the self during the early principate has been examined e.g. by Foucault (1986); Veyne (1978; 1987: 36–37 and 229–232); see, more recently, Edwards (1997); Long (1996); Toohey (2004); Bartsch (2006); cf. Gill (2006).

public monuments has been studied in detail.¹¹⁴ Where biography and autobiography are concerned, the prominence of the emperor found expression through inscribed texts – above all, Augustus’ own *Res Gestae* – and through the appearance of imperial *vitae* as a distinctive subgenre.¹¹⁵ Not only were political careers now subject to the power of the *princeps*, so too were many of the commemorative forms through which aristocrats represented their achievements in the capital city.

Even in the midst of these changes, the Romans hardly abandoned the great men of the past or the *cursus honorum*; rather, it fell to select critics to observe that conventional symbols of civic honor had been deprived of their substance. The language of slavery helped such critics to emphasize the suppression, restoration, or defense of *libertas*. Here, I am concerned specifically with the application of metaphors of slavery and freedom to transitions in the individual life course in ways that diverge from traditional frameworks. For examples, I look again to the Stoa and Pauline Christianity, contexts in which the concept of ethical slavery worked to define spiritual progress against degraded systems of worldly achievement.

The biographical implications of these metaphors include an impetus to structure life narratives in terms other than a series of offices. Cicero’s *Paradoxa Stoicorum* contains the first extended treatment in Latin of the precept that “only the wise man is free.”¹¹⁶ Cicero’s discussion rests on the tenet that freedom is the ability to live according to one’s own volition.¹¹⁷ His treatment of this problem hints at a meaningful connection between philosophy and biography:¹¹⁸

Quis igitur vivit, ut vult, nisi qui recta sequitur, qui gaudet officio, cui vivendi via considerata atque provisa est ... qui nihil dicit, nihil facit, nihil cogitat denique nisi libenter ac libere, cuius omnia consilia resque omnes, quas gerit, ab ipso profisciscuntur eodemque referuntur, nec est ulla res quae plus apud eum polleat quam ipsius voluntas atque iudicium?

Who therefore lives as he wishes, if not the man who pursues things that are right, who takes pleasure in duty, whose way of life has been thought out and planned ... who says nothing, does nothing, and thinks nothing unless willingly and freely, whose intentions and affairs all originate from him and

¹¹⁴ See especially Zanker (1988); Galinsky (1996); Alföldy (1991); Wallace-Hadrill (2008a); Eck (1984, 2010a).

¹¹⁵ Kraus (2005a: 249–253).

¹¹⁶ Garnsey (1996: 129); Manning (1989: 1521). Cic. *Paradoxa Stoicorum* 5.33: “Ὅτι μόνος ὁ σοφὸς ἐλεύθερος καὶ πᾶς ἄφρων δοῦλος.

¹¹⁷ Cic. *Paradoxa Stoicorum* 5.34: *Quid est enim libertas? Potestas vivendi ut velis.*

¹¹⁸ Cic. *Paradoxa Stoicorum* 5.34.

return to the same place; nor is there anything which prevails upon him more than his own will and judgment?

In the phrase *via vivendi*, Cicero evokes both senses of *via*, which may refer to a mode of behavior, as well as to an actual path or journey that can be plotted beforehand. As Cicero goes on to suggest several times, in the idiom of Stoicism, a righteous progression through life has nothing to do with one's place in the political hierarchy nor with one's legal status.¹¹⁹ From this perspective, a fool who brags about having been acclaimed *imperator* is no different than a lowly slave who thinks that he excels his peers because he holds some special post in the household.¹²⁰ In other words, a man's ethical biography should be distinguished from and ascribed a higher value than his social rank and ambitions.

Seneca, nearly a century later, embraces the motif of ethical slavery but pays greater attention to the issue of monumentality than does Cicero in his treatment of the same topic.¹²¹ Advocating a humane approach to managing one's slave household, Seneca brings together the Stoic precepts that all men come from the same stock and that morality, not status, is the foundation of true *libertas*.¹²² Rank, wealth, and other mundane achievements are futile markers of character, whether one is speaking of the senatorial career path or of the hierarchies in a slave *familia*.¹²³ This theme addresses the politics of commemoration when (to name one example) Seneca warns in *De Brevitate Vitae* that a man who has reached the pinnacle of civic achievement may yet realize that he has wasted his life in pursuit of a funerary inscription (*laborasse ... in titulum sepulcri*).¹²⁴ For the imperial Stoic, as I noted in [Chapter 3](#), the rejection of traditional biographical frameworks applies also to the question of ancestry. Engaging Rome's commemorative tradition, Seneca admonishes his readers not to be impressed by rows of *imagines* or by elaborate family trees (*stemmata*), because the universe is the common parent of all human beings.¹²⁵

Seneca develops a connection between slavery, Stoicism, and the human life course that is already nascent in Cicero. Yet in doing so, he displays a heightened concern for the significance of burial inscriptions and other

¹¹⁹ Cic. *Paradoxa Stoicorum* 5.33, 40, 42.

¹²⁰ Cic. *Paradoxa Stoicorum* 5.36–38.

¹²¹ E.g. Sen. *Dial.* 3.21.4, 9.2.5, 10.20.1; *Ep.* 88.38.

¹²² Sen. *Ep.* 47.10.

¹²³ Sen. *Ep.* 47.15–17.

¹²⁴ Sen. *Dial.* 10.20.1; cf. 3.21.4, on the desire of the overweening soul to occupy the *fasti* with a single name and to spread *tituli* throughout the world.

¹²⁵ Sen. *Ben.* 3.28.2.

commemorative media, especially in their capacity to manifest forms of ethical bondage that (from one perspective) plagued the upper orders. Nor was Seneca alone in arguing that the redistribution of political power had weakened the capacity of *tituli* and *imagines* to define aristocratic life stories. In what follows, I suggest that Seneca, Epictetus, and Paul approached this problem in part by mirroring strategies observed in monuments that organize ex-slaves' personal data according to standards other than legal status and relationships of dependency. These monuments demonstrate the efficacy of appealing to alternative sources of meaning and, by doing so, offered one potential model for ancient thinkers who wished to reconsider the validity of traditional biographical frameworks.

Stoicism and Christianity as Alternative Frameworks

In the writings of imperial Stoics and Paul, modes of describing ethical or spiritual progress evolved alongside metaphors of slavery and liberation. These authors employ the language of slaveholding to advocate for measures of personal growth and achievement other than political honor and to emphasize the integrity of the soul as it moved from one moral stage to another. Such rhetorical forms had a long history in their respective traditions, but contemporary parallels with the commemorative behavior of freedmen suggest that they also came into contact with servile culture. As I have already argued for both Seneca and Paul, identifying with slaves and ex-slaves could illuminate issues that confronted members of other social groups, namely senators and *equites* in the case of Seneca and a diverse constituency of Christian converts in that of Paul.

Imperial Stoics use the metaphor of slavery in a negative sense to comment on the devaluation of traditional systems of honor. Men who invested themselves too deeply in the commemoration of an ancestral line or *cursus* revealed themselves to be slaves of ambition. In this same context, Seneca undertakes a more positive application of the slavery metaphor when he advises Lucilius, "suppose that you are not a Roman *equus* but a former slave."¹²⁶ By identifying with this group, the student of Stoicism could recognize humans' universal capacity for virtue and, on this basis, replace established modes of self-definition with more meaningful, ethical ones.¹²⁷ Epictetus, who was himself a freedman, was perhaps in an even better

¹²⁶ Sen. *Ep.* 44.6.

¹²⁷ See above, pp. 91–95.

position than was Seneca to absorb the habits of Roman *liberti*.¹²⁸ He, too, employs the language of slavery to offer Stoicism as a more effective measurement of individual progress than ancestry, offices, or legal status. A man who can claim noble birth, membership in the Senate, consulships, imperial favor, and ownership of his own chattel will nevertheless remain a slave as long as his ambitions subject him to the power of others.¹²⁹ At the opposite end of the social ladder, but with the same implications, Epictetus proffers the slave who wishes to be manumitted in the false expectation that he will suddenly acquire a new form of agency.¹³⁰

In this latter case, however, manumission only perpetuates servitude because it delivers the freedman into another, equally problematic state of dependency. Even if this notional freedman should ascend through Roman society – from riches, to military service, to enrollment in the Senate itself – he will not have avoided the same moral slavery that plagues his freeborn counterparts.¹³¹ In these passages, Epictetus revisits the common trope that only the wise man is free, but like Seneca, he does so with reference to the structures of biographical commemoration that had come under scrutiny during the empire. As an alternative to wealth or a public career, Epictetus recommends the cultivation of the self through philosophy, with one's teacher playing the role of emancipator (*karpistes*) into ethical freedom.¹³²

Seneca and Epictetus demonstrate how the metaphor of ethical slavery could strengthen arguments in favor of adopting Stoicism as an alternative to conventional biographical formats, which depended on a series of meaningless titles. This appeal to an external source of legitimacy correlates with patterns visible in freedmen's commemorative inscriptions, although the *liberti* I have considered turned toward personal relationships, time, and cult, as opposed to philosophy.¹³³ In this respect, Christian discourse contains an even more compelling analogue to freed slaves' epigraphic practices, because it asserts the individual's relationship with the divine as a primary marker of personal growth. The biographical aspects of the

¹²⁸ Bradley (1994: 174). Like Seneca, Epictetus shows how philosophical discourse could respond to and absorb parts of freed culture, but his personal background does not appear to play a major role in that dialogue, even if it helped smooth the way.

¹²⁹ Epictetus 4.1.8–10.

¹³⁰ Epictetus 4.1.34–35.

¹³¹ Epictetus 4.1.35–40; this rise to faux nobility concludes with “the best and sleekest slavery” (τὴν καλλίστην καὶ λιπαρωτάτην δουλείαν δουλεύει).

¹³² Epictetus 4.1.113–115; cf. 4.1.146.

¹³³ In light of the emphasis that commemorative inscriptions place on literacy, however, one cannot rule out the idea that intellectual achievements may have played a similar role to the themes considered above; see e.g. Sen. *Ad Polybium* 2.5. His praise for a member of the imperial household uses *liberalia studia* as a unifying biographical framework that does not rely on the institution of slavery.

Christian metaphor of servitude to God or Christ used the language of chattel slavery to propose a new mode of self-definition that would lead to spiritual freedom. Like Stoicism, early Christian thought interacted not just with the ideology of slaveholding, but also with subcultures produced by the experiences of slavery and manumission.

As I discussed in [Chapter 2](#) with reference to personal virtues, metaphors of slavery appear throughout the New Testament, and particularly in the Pauline epistles, where “slaves of sin” are encouraged to liberate themselves by submitting to Christ. Such motifs work to highlight the distinction between ethics and legal status by implying that any man is a slave if he lacks spiritual freedom. For Paul, all members of the church should aspire to be loyal servants of God, no matter what legal category they might inhabit. The most salient point for the present discussion is Paul’s engagement of the idea that one might escape moral servitude not through a full restoration of freedom but by acquiring a new, divine master. This metaphor of spiritual bondage aligns with the Christian precept of “power accomplished through weakness” and allows for a measure of continuity, as well as of differentiation.¹³⁴

Christ was the paradigmatic example of willing servitude to God, as in the hymn quoted by Paul in *Philippians*, to which I return here in more detail.¹³⁵

Τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὁ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ὃς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων οὐχ ἄρπαγμόν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ, ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβὼν, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος καὶ σχήματι εὐρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου, θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ. διὸ καὶ ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν καὶ ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα ...

Be of the same mind among yourselves as was Jesus Christ, who, while existing in the form of God, did not consider it robbery (?) to be equal to God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave and being made in the likeness of men. And found as a man in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross. On which account also God exalted him exceedingly and gave to him the name which is above every name ...

According to this model, Christ descended from an original state of parity with God into the form of a slave – that is, of a human being – but through

¹³⁴ 2 Cor. 12:9 (ἡ γὰρ δύναμις ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελεῖται).

¹³⁵ Phil. 2:5–9. On issues of translation, see Meeks and Fitzgerald (2007: *ad loc.*). See also Byron (2003: 150–180), although in closing he denies any connection to the institution of slavery; cf. Glancy (2002: 100–101).

obedience and crucifixion was able to return to his former position. The theme of Christ's service to God likewise appears in the Gospels, whose association with Greco-Roman biography has been affirmed on formal grounds.¹³⁶ In this particular manifestation, slavery represents an intermediate chapter along a narrative of departure and homecoming that elevates a spiritual definition of status over a legal one.

In some instances manumission from sin explicitly led to another form of servitude – that is, enslavement to righteousness, Christ, God, or even mutually to other people.¹³⁷ A representative statement of this process comes at Romans 6:17–18: “And, having been liberated from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.” In this formulation, man exists in a perpetual state of servility but may free himself by taking on righteousness as his new master. In its biographical aspects, such a model on the one hand reproduces the values of slaveholders by identifying the ex-slave's continued obedience as a thread connecting him to his past. On the other hand, it allows for the insertion of an alternative system of meaning that promises to free the individual from any sort of worldly enslavement.

Continuity in the Spiritual Life Course

I have focused mainly on how Stoic and Christian thinkers sought to replace conventional forms of biography with ethical and spiritual paradigms, in part through the imagery of slavery and liberation. These philosophical arguments resonate with the practice among freed commemorators of supplementing the dominant ideology of slaveholding by appealing to other sources of meaning. Perhaps even more telling are the ways in which Stoicism and Pauline Christianity mirror ex-slaves' use of alternative frameworks to define the individual in terms of a continuous development from birth to death. Both Stoic and early Christian thinkers sought to establish unity between the stages of figurative enslavement and freedom that made up the spiritual lifespan.

The Stoic *proficiens*, by definition, was in a state of evolution. This attention to process also characterizes the Stoics' treatment of ethical slavery and freedom as biographical constructs. For instance, Seneca suggests on the one hand that domestic and political hierarchies could present an impediment to natural growth or suddenly dissolve in a

¹³⁶ BurrIDGE (2004); e.g. John 4:34.

¹³⁷ Examples collected by Harris (1999: 80–85); he cites Old Testament precedents at Lev. 25:55, Ps. 116:16, LXX 115:7.

downturn of fortune. Thus the wine-pourer who must preserve his boyish looks for his master “does battle with his age” and “cannot get away from his youth.”¹³⁸ On the other hand, aristocrats who are “beginning to ascend to senatorial rank by doing military service” may be captured in a defeat and forced to live out their lives in captivity.¹³⁹ Rather than succumb to either one of these pitfalls, the student of Stoic doctrine would do well to focus on ethics. Seneca reinforces this point when he advises masters to invite slaves to dinner on the basis of character, rather than duties or rank.¹⁴⁰ Character should be evaluated in light of the slave’s potential (not current) *mores*, because “if there is anything servile in them due to their lowly associations, intercourse with more upright men will expel it.”¹⁴¹ For slaves, as for *ingenui*, a developmental view of the ethical self provides a salutary alternative to other methods of charting individual progress.

This model of the life course connects directly with Seneca’s interpretation of the precept that all souls can be free and with his cynicism about ancestral masks and inscriptions as a valuable means of structuring one’s personal history. An upright soul, he reminds Lucilius, “may descend into a Roman *eques*, or a freedman (*libertinus*), or a slave.”¹⁴² Drawing a metaphor from the plastic arts, Seneca urges his student to shape himself (*ingere*) in the likeness (*imago*) of God – not from gold or silver, but from the humble raw material of clay. In its immediate context, this imagery may allude not just to sculpture as a form of representation, but also to that medium’s commemorative function. Even more striking, however, is Seneca’s advice to relinquish the desire for elaborate *tituli* and be content with an inscription that reads merely, “Oh, what a virtuous man!”¹⁴³ These words achieve with the notion of Stoic virtue precisely what freedmen accomplished with personal relationships, time, and religion; that is, they encompass an entire biography by appealing to a value system that was independent of the ideologies traditionally applied in this setting.

Epictetus, like Seneca, frames a progressive view of biography in terms of the language of slaveholding. In describing how best to attain a state of moral liberty, Epictetus employs the metaphor of “the road which leads to freedom” and suggests that the only dependable travelling companion

¹³⁸ Sen. *Ep.* 47.7.

¹³⁹ Sen. *Ep.* 47.10.

¹⁴⁰ Sen. *Ep.* 47.15; note the concept of *manumissio per mensam*.

¹⁴¹ Sen. *Ep.* 47.15–16.

¹⁴² Sen. *Ep.* 31.11.

¹⁴³ Sen. *Ep.* 88.38: *Simus hoc titulo rusticiore contenti: ‘o virum bonum!’*

is God.¹⁴⁴ To move successfully along this path, a person must acquire a knowledge of what things are within his control and concern himself with these exclusively.¹⁴⁵ The rare men who achieve this – Diogenes and Socrates, for example – are free in the knowledge that they are fundamentally alone in the world, at least in a spiritual sense.¹⁴⁶ Yet the pursuit of such freedom is an ongoing struggle in which Epictetus himself is still mired.¹⁴⁷ Through such a focus on process, the Stoic metaphor of ethical slavery provides an alternative to conventional norms, not just in assessing one's current status but also in describing one's progress through life. That is to say that philosophy offers a framework for biography in which the protagonist is the ethical self as it proceeds from servitude through liberation.

While admittedly selective, these passages show how writers under the principate employed the theme of ethical slavery in a biographical setting (again, with biography being broadly defined). In particular, Stoic philosophy constitutes a standard of measure that has the potential to replace debased systems like the political *cursus*; for Epictetus, especially, it lends coherence to the story of the soul's journey through life. Such appeals to a supplementary ideological frame run parallel to features of ex-slaves' culture that lend continuity to life narratives within the realities of a compulsory and subordinate legal status. The fact that Stoic writers express these ideas through the rhetoric of slavery and freedom is suggestive of contact between philosophical discourse and the commemorative practices of former slaves.

In Christian texts, the question of biographical unity is somewhat more complicated than in the Stoic tradition. According to the model of Jesus' descent into human form and subsequent return to heaven, metaphorical slavery lacks the ability to encompass the entirety of his journey. Rather, it is his relationship to God that provides the substance and structure of his biography. This pattern of descent into slavery and subsequent return to an original purity also emerges in *Exegesis on the Soul*, a Gnostic tractate that configures the soul's debased embodiment as a kind of prostitution.¹⁴⁸ Like the Stoic doctrine of ethical freedom, such representations preserve the identity of the soul over the course of its fall and salvation by drawing on a

¹⁴⁴ Epictetus 4.1.131; cf. 4.1.98, although this latter passage may also be a simple allusion to the "road of life."

¹⁴⁵ E.g. Epictetus 4.1.81–84.

¹⁴⁶ Epictetus 4.1.152–162.

¹⁴⁷ Epictetus 4.1.151.

¹⁴⁸ Robinson (1970).

religious or moral system whose authority transcends military and political structures for measuring one's journey through life.

From one point of view, freedmen's construction of biographical unity in terms independent of the master-slave relationship may have helped to strengthen the Christian metaphor of slavery, at least in some of its aspects. Like the votive formula *servus vovit, liber solvit*, this model of Christ and its Gnostic counterpart use divinity as a way of maintaining the integrity of the individual as he moves from one level of empowerment to another. What is more, the familial bond between father and son embedded in this religious framework helps to repair any breaks in the narrative that would imply that servitude affected Christ's essential connection to God.¹⁴⁹

On the other hand, while the example of Christ attests biographical coherence through an association with the divine, Paul sometimes uses the imagery of slavery and freedom to emphasize the importance for Christians of disavowing their previous state of ignorance and moral corruption. So at Galatians 5:1 he exhorts, "Christ has liberated us to freedom; therefore, stand fast and never be held again by the yoke of servitude." The imagery of stagnation and rebirth has the power to strengthen this divide by showing how "tarrying in sin" (ἐπιμένωμεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ) may lead to an abandonment of the past in exchange for "the newness of life" (ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς) on the model of Christ's resurrection.¹⁵⁰

Paul's synthesis of these metaphors to describe the passage from vice to virtue has been interpreted in light of Patterson's theory of social death, whereby enslavement extinguishes the individual's personal history:¹⁵¹

Both liberty and slavery are the direct consequences of death. It is death to one's own slavery which enables one to be alive in freedom; while at the same time death "to the world" is an entry into the new slavery to Christ.

This insight reveals how the Christian metaphor of slavery interacted with two distinct elements of slaveholding ideology, one which imposed a firm separation between slavery and freedom, and another which lessened that gap by demanding humility from the freedman. In transforming liberation from sin into a new form of servitude, Paul intensifies the assumption that servility encompasses the individual's life; only by death into Christ does the perennial slave escape from this conceptual prison.

¹⁴⁹ On fathers and sons, see Lyall (1984).

¹⁵⁰ Rom. 6:1, 4.

¹⁵¹ Combès (1998: 87–89).

These examples reinforce the view that Paul was capable both of combining the perspectives of slaves and masters and of replicating one or the other in the construction of slavery's symbolic meaning within ecclesiastical discourse. Paul demonstrates a willingness to play on the tensions inherent in this institution, not just in the ideology of slave-owning but also in the ability of slaves and freedmen to work with conflicting modes of self-definition. Christianity, like Stoicism, offered an alternative to belabored social and political frameworks according to which members of the aristocracy had conventionally organized their biographies, although it did not gain traction among the elite until the fourth century CE.¹⁵² Nevertheless, even in the first century, Paul gave the same emphasis to the integrity of the soul along its spiritual journey that select freedmen created in their epigraphic monuments as they sought to supplement or resist the dominant paradigms of enslavement and patronage. Stoic and Christian texts allude in different ways to the significance of biographical strategies to which freedmen appealed in the process of negotiating their place in society.

Conclusion

Freed commemorators responded to a set of rhetorical demands that were unique to their social position. When deciding what data to include in their commemorative inscriptions, *liberti* had to confront the fact that the ideology of slaveholding defined their life stories primarily in terms of legal status. From this perspective, manumission imposed a sharp break in the life course; patronage offered the main source of unity that could bind the past to the present. In this situation, many ex-slaves reproduced dominant paradigms, but others appealed to friends and family, cult, occupation, or the Roman calendar to define their lives as coherent wholes. These frameworks might accompany celebrations of upward mobility, but they illustrate freedmen's capacity to construct their biographies along lines other than social death and rebirth.

While this pattern may have been latent in the cultural practices of Rome's servile population, it emerged with particular strength in commemorative inscriptions, because for most freedmen these texts presented a rare opportunity to create an enduring biographical record. Petronius' critique of Trimalchio's self-advertisement reflects a pointed engagement of freed slaves' epigraphic habit. The same may be true for

¹⁵² Salzmann (2002: 5).

Seneca and other imperial authors who use the language of slavery to condemn a system of values that rates *imagines* and the *cursus honorum* too highly. In light of the strong association between literary and inscribed forms of biography, on the one hand, and freed slaves' epigraphic habit, on the other, it is productive to interpret metaphors of ethical slavery against the background of this dynamic exchange.

Examining the construction of the human life course provides a window into definitions of the individual life course as it evolved from republic to empire. Ex-slaves' articulation of coherent biographies in the absence of ancestry or access to high political office speaks to the existence, within this subculture, of a reflexive form of self-definition that was grounded in family and community, as opposed to political titles. Slave and freed culture was not the only source from which the metaphors of slavery and manumission derived philosophical meaning, but the ability of ex-slaves to create continuity in their lives would have added an important social dimension to this traditional form. When Seneca advised his readers to think of themselves as freed slaves, he was both leaning on the Stoic principle that human beings share a common origin and drawing a socially embedded connection with a group that existed at the margins of civic honor.

Conclusion

The changes wrought by the formation of the principate had wide-ranging consequences for Roman culture. As the monarchy consolidated political authority in the hands of a single ruler, the elite economy of honor reoriented itself around this central figure. Whereas aristocratic competition in the republic had focused on ancestry and the *cursus honorum*, imperial patronage now took precedence as a means of achieving the highest offices and other marks of prestige. Celebrations of commanders' military *virtus* fell to the discretion of the *princeps*, as did many functions of government. In the opinion of certain aristocrats, expressed in particular settings, autocracy destabilized conventional symbols of civic honor by sapping them of meaningful substance. Yet the system continued to operate despite these objections, even when resistance was taken to violent extremes in the form of revolt or political suicide. Nor did the image of the *civilis princeps* necessarily alleviate the fact that the senatorial and equestrian orders ultimately reported to the emperor.

At the same time, developments in Roman social and political structures promoted freedmen to positions of increased visibility at the core of the imperial system. Economic opportunities, many of which were afforded by continued involvement with patrons, galvanized a privileged subset of the urban freed population, including wealthy artisans and those who served in elite households – above all, in the *familia Caesaris*. The resources amassed by these individuals funded their participation in public life and facilitated their cultural activities, including a vibrant epigraphic habit that left a clear impression on the historical record. In large part through the honorific and burial monuments commissioned by and for urban freedmen, modern historians are able to study this subculture with relatively high levels of detail and nuance.

While ex-slaves who commissioned inscribed monuments shared with aristocrats the common goal of preserving their names and achievements in an enduring medium, freedmen approached this endeavor from a unique

perspective and within socially determined parameters. Literary fame lay open to a select few, but most anyone of moderate wealth would have been able to acquire a tombstone. In the case of former slaves, this type of commemoration presented a special assortment of issues, in part because claiming civic and social inclusion also meant confronting its limits. Even though some *liberti* apparently embraced the impetus to advertise their new status, in doing so they necessarily addressed their prior enslavement and its implications for freedom. In the pursuit of immortality through commemoration, ex-slaves employed a variety of complex strategies for representing themselves and each other in the urban landscapes of imperial Rome and Italy.

Like the master–slave and patron–freedman relationships, the interaction between elite and freed cultures operated according to principles of both reciprocity and exploitation. On the one hand, freedmen appropriated such virtues as industry and obedience – ideals which were imposed by the expectations of patrons – and transformed them into a basis for legitimate recognition in death. By contrast, some freedmen rejected or bypassed dominant systems of meaning to forge alternate modes of self-representation. Monuments that balance positive depictions of work and wealth with adherence to social norms or use alternative frameworks to establish continuity between slavery and freedom placed these revised forms back into circulation in the wider culture. Moreover, analysis of diverse literary texts suggests that imperial aristocrats consumed these aspects of freed culture to pursue their own goals.

Elite slave-owners in the Roman world were accustomed to thinking about a range of relationships through the lens of captivity and freedom, and the metaphors through which people examined these parallels interacted with their social milieux. Although Roman authors regularly exploit the subjectivity of slaves and *liberti*, they also repurpose tactics that likely originated in the slave population and continued to be used by freedmen, albeit in a modified fashion. Elite authors who manufacture authoritative personae from a posture of obedient service implicitly acknowledge slaves' and freedmen's capacity to perform similar behaviors on a different stage. Likewise, Stoic and early Christian thinkers develop metaphors of ethical slavery that echo in some important respects the biographical strategies generated by freed culture.

The rise of autocracy created an environment in which servile tactics became increasingly relevant to the problems that aristocrats faced when they found themselves speaking to power. Under the principate, even the highest-ranking members of the senatorial order occupied a subordinate

role that was consistently marked as one of servitude. While other paradigms of domination existed and overlapped with or reinforced one another, slavery and freedom provided one of the central rubrics under which the elite negotiated its relationship to the *princeps*. Ideological assumptions about slaves and freedmen tainted these images with an abject passivity that reflected a perceived loss of *libertas*. For this reason, among others, explicitly casting the relationship between the emperor and his aristocratic subjects as one between patron and freedman would have upset the discourse of political freedom, even if the analogy were fundamentally valid. Nevertheless, in some rhetorical contexts, strategies associated with *liberti* were used by elite men who sought to balance deference with more traditional concepts of honor. In this way, freedmen emerge as active participants in the transformation of aristocratic culture under the empire.

Early Christianity may also have benefitted from the models proffered by freedmen, although the full impact of this development would not be felt until late antiquity. Situating Paul's epistles in the midst of the Roman slave system illuminates one aspect of this longer, multifaceted process. Metaphors of enslavement and redemption gained significance in dialogue with the servile cultures that thrived among segments of the early church. Paul presents humility and physical endurance not only as a path to salvation for converts, but also as a principle of daily practice. At the same time, a desire to find alternative frameworks on which to base one's life story brought servile culture and early Christian thought into alignment with one another. These correspondences indicate that Paul joined other members of the Greco-Roman elite in utilizing forms that slaves and freedmen crafted in response to their social position.

Freedmen's epigraphic strategies add a layer of complexity to the formulation of Christian values, first within the nascent church and later in a vast cultural movement that would sweep across the Mediterranean. Within the chronological and geographic boundaries of this study, I have only traced the outlines of a dialogue between Pauline thought and servile culture that resonates with patterns in Stoicism and other non-Christian literature. In such cases, metaphors of slavery and freedom operate as sites of cultural exchange and contestation, even as they reinforce social norms. Before the Italian aristocracy converted in significant numbers, members of the upper orders were appropriating servile modes that may have rendered them more susceptible to Christian moral frameworks. Finding power and the promise of immortality in submission to a single authority became an imperative of Roman politics in the early principate.

Freed slaves contributed to these broader phenomena by fashioning their commemorative personae from within the confines of a subordinate status.

The influence of *liberti* on elite culture stemmed largely from ex-slaves' integration into the free community, even at the highest echelons of society and despite vehement objections, such as those issued against powerful imperial freedmen by Tacitus and Pliny, and the trenchant critiques of perceived status dissonance by Petronius, Horace, and others. As Patterson observed from a cross-cultural perspective, manumission initiates a process of integration that gradually brings freed slaves from the margins into the fabric of their communities, although it often takes multiple generations for the stigma of slavery to fade completely.¹ In the Roman case, this combination of inclusion and marginality both ensured that *liberti* would engage aristocratic forms and that they would do so from a distinctive point of view.

Even if the freedmen considered here shared certain behaviors and interests with *ingenui* who ranked below the elite – for instance, artisans and traders, soldiers, or the urban *plebs* as a whole – the concentration of ex-slaves in the epigraphic landscape of Rome and Italy strongly suggests the existence of an identifiable subculture founded on the shared experience of enslavement and manumission. In turn, Petronius' treatment of inscribed texts in the *Cena Trimalchionis* indicates that, in all probability, aristocrats in the first century CE distinguished freed culture in part by its investment in inscribed writing and funerary commemoration. Whereas Petronius represents Trimalchio's behavior as an empty imitation of elite customs and values, the epigraphic and archaeological evidence for ex-slaves' commemorative activities tells another story. The strategies that freed commemorators employed, even by making ostensibly simple choices about the contents of an epitaph, refashioned dominant ideals and behavioral standards in subtle, even subversive, ways.

Considering freedmen's monuments as remnants of a subculture within Roman culture not only inverts the trickle-down model that has traditionally governed studies of *liberti*, but does so without deemphasizing the unique character of the freed population or, at the other extreme, envisioning ex-slaves as occupying a world apart. Establishing the parameters of a dialogue between elite and freed cultures in the Roman empire requires one to weigh disparate types of evidence to identify potential areas of contact. Where the epigraphic material is concerned, I have taken an approach that privileges detailed discussion of limited corpora and

¹ Patterson (1982: 249).

examined closely how the decisions of individual commemorators shape the personae being depicted. Although these analyses are assessed against previous studies that have explored related phenomena on a larger scale, they cannot be generalized to the entire freed population. Instead, I turned to Latin literature for confirmation that aristocrats were at least aware of the strategies that certain *liberti* employed in the commemorative sphere.

Despite these challenges, it is worth locating freedmen's monuments in a wide cultural context to assess the ways in which responses to slavery and manumission contributed to shifts in aristocratic culture under the principate. Very few of the freedmen whose tombs I considered reached a level of wealth and power comparable to that of Eurysaces, let alone Pallas at the height of his career. Yet all acts of commemoration, however modest, brought ex-slaves into a field of activity that included members of the imperial elite, who faced the problem of how best to define and preserve one's achievements under a monarchical system. In this respect, a literary work like Tacitus' *Agricola* has more in common with a freedman's epitaph than may be obvious at first glance. Both create a persona for the deceased and, in the process, make claims about the efficacy of personal virtues, as well as about the nature and validity of social and political hierarchies that deeply affected the commemorand's life.

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Index

- a rationibus*, 108, 112–113
 Abascantus, imperial freedman, 31–32, 119
adsertor libertatis, 76–77, 81, 102
 Aesop, 95–98, 102–103
 afterlife, 35, 67–68, 71
 age at death, 22
 Agricola, 36, 56–60, 71
 Agrippina, the younger, 108
 Alexandria, 112, 119
 ancestry, 54, 92, 94, 103, 160, 162, 169–170
 Antony, M., 87, 123
arcarii, 151, 155–156
 artisans, 1, 12, 35, 48, 52, 143, 170, 173
Augustales, 21–22, 29–30, 43, 84–85, 145–146
 Augustus, emperor, 75, 77, 81, 87, 101–102, 115,
 118, 120, 125
 and the epigraphic habit, 26, 28, 36, 56, 123,
 158–159
 social legislation, 3, 51
 autocracy, 55, 57–59, 71, 75–76, 78, 91, 99,
 105, 107, 111–112, 116–117, 129, 170–171;
 see also monarchy
 biographies, 12, 14, 16, 22, 33, 47, 56, 94, 116,
 131–169; *see also* life course
 alternative frameworks, 33–34, 131, 133, 136,
 150, 155–156, 161–168, 171, 172
 continuity in, 15–16, 25, 33, 81, 85, 131,
 134–136, 138, 140, 143–144, 151, 157,
 163–169, 171
 and political change, 157–161
 birthdays, 22, 133, 152–156
 Bona Dea, 147–148
 Brown, V., 20
 Buckland, W. W., 34
 burial culture of Roman freedmen, 21, 25, 35;
 see also tombs
 Caesar, Julius, 46–47, 63, 77, 108, 117–118, 158
 calendar, Roman, 152, 154–155, 168
 Caligula, emperor, 112, 119, 143
 Callistus, imperial freedman, 107, 119
 Cassius Dio, *see* Dio Cassius
 Catiens Philotimus, P., 39–40
 Cato, the elder, 158
 Cato, the younger, 117
 Christianity, 33–34, 36–37, 41, 61–72, 75, 114–115,
 157, 161–164, 166–168, 171–172
 metaphors of slavery, 33–34, 37, 61–72, 159,
 161, 163–164, 166–168
 Cicero, 35, 39, 42, 94, 116–118, 158–160
 citizenship of Roman freedmen, 2, 12–13, 16, 21,
 51, 76, 134, 138, 150
 Claudius, emperor, 58, 60, 81, 96, 105, 107–109,
 114, 116, 119–120, 123, 126, 143
 Claudius Etruscus, Ti., 104–105
 father, 40, 104–106, 112, 114, 118, 120, 129
 Claudius Pulcher, Ap., 150
 clients, freeborn, 3, 36, 38, 79–80, 152, 154
cognomina, 11, 107, 122, 128, 138, 154
collegia, 2, 12, 21, 49, 144–146
 burial, 17, 145
colliberti, 74, 83, 137–142
columbaria, 52, 144
 Cominius Abascantus, Q., 29–30
 commemorative politics, 20, 35, 53, 60, 160
conserui, 66, 137–142
contubernales, 22–24, 85, 136–138, 142–143,
 146, 156
 Corinth, 63
 Cornelius Nepos, 158
 crucifixion, 67, 70, 164
cubicularii, 119, 140
 cult, 21, 28, 33, 133, 147–151, 162, 168
 of slaves, 147
 cultural exchange, 73–103, 172
 sites of, 27–32
 trickle-down model, 18, 173
 culture, Roman
 elite, 4, 26, 55, 103, 173
 freed, 5, 15–18, 33, 36, 51, 73–74, 81–83, 85–86,
 88, 91, 103, 122, 133, 136, 157, 171, 173

- culture, Roman (*cont.*)
 slave and freed/servile, 15–18, 33, 59, 67, 71,
 74, 90, 97, 99–100, 102, 133, 161, 169, 172
cursus honorum, 34, 56, 61, 131, 157–159, 161, 166,
 169–170
 Curtius Rufus, Q., 58
- death, social, *see* social death
decuriones, 21, 27–29, 43, 56, 109
 deference, 15, 36–37, 42–43, 47–48, 56–58, 60,
 62, 65, 69, 71, 78, 88, 172
Di Manes, 22, 28, 49, 141, 143, 146, 155
diligentia, 45, 110
 Dio Cassius, 60, 119
 discipline, military, 36, 58
 dishonor, 79, 92, 104, 109, 115
dispensatores, 14–15, 125–127, 154–156
 Domitian, emperor, 31, 57–60, 104, 119
 Douglass, Frederick, 153
- Egypt, 153–154
 elite, Roman
 competition, 55–56, 87, 92, 128
 culture, 4, 26, 55, 103, 173
 response to autocracy, 4, 26, 32–34, 36, 55–61,
 71, 87–88, 105, 131, 157–161, 170–172
 emperors, 28, 32–33, 36, 38, 55–60, 70, 73,
 75–76, 79–82, 93, 103–106, 108–116,
 118–121, 126–129, 157, 159, 170, 172; *see also*
names of individual emperors
 Epictetus, 157, 161–162, 165–166
 epigraphic habit, 55
 freedmen, 21–27, 50, 63, 81–86, 168–170
 epitaphs, 10, 16, 22–27, 29–30, 41–50, 52–54, 68,
 71, 84–86, 89, 109, 122, 127, 137–142, 146,
 152, 173–174
 epithets, emotive, 22, 30, 41, 53, 68, 140
equites, 36, 43–44, 56, 60–61, 80, 88–89, 93–94,
 105, 111, 158, 161, 165, 170
 freedmen promoted to, 105–106
 euergetism, 20–22, 27, 83, 146, 152
 Eurysaces, tomb, 5–15, 19–20, 25, 35, 52, 81, 85,
 103, 174
exempla, 32, 36, 39–40, 49, 61, 67, 70–71, 74, 76,
 78, 92, 94, 98, 105–107, 110–111, 120, 129, 158
- fables, 19, 33, 74, 90, 95–103; *see also* Aesop;
 Phaedrus
fama, 24–25, 41–54, 58–59, 71
 usage of word, 42
familia Caesaris, 18, 25, 32–33, 40, 56, 81, 103–131,
 140, 143–144, 156, 170
 personal influence, 111, 118, 121
 praise for, 4, 106, 108–109, 120
fides, 32, 37–38, 43, 45, 48, 53, 86, 109–111, 114
- Finley, M. I., 34
 Fortuna, 14–15, 53
 freedmen, Roman
 behavioral standards/norms, 37–41
 biases against, 25, 31, 71, 74, 81, 101–102
 culture, *see* culture, Roman, freed
 families, 2–3, 16–17, 21–22, 24–25, 27, 29–30,
 35, 47, 50–52, 54, 106, 131, 135–138, 143, 156,
 158, 168–169
 freeborn children, 1–3, 17, 22, 135, 138
 freedwomen, 23–24, 41, 50–51, 53, 108, 116,
 140, 143, 156
 imperial, *see familia Caesaris*
 independent, 40, 135
 obligations to patrons, 37–38, 48, 54, 65,
 76–78, 114, 135
 stereotypes, 4, 21, 31, 40, 48, 74, 85, 86, 88, 91,
 95, 101–102, 133
 upward mobility, 1, 39, 82, 94, 138, 145, 150, 168
- freedom
 ethical, 95, 162, 166
 metaphors of slavery and, 33–34, 37, 59–80,
 91–95, 102, 109, 115, 129, 133, 157, 159,
 161–169, 170–172
 political, 77, 87–88, 106, 172; *see also libertas*
 friendship, 3, 47, 79–80, 88, 140
 Fronto, 79–80
 frugality, 11, 15, 52, 88, 109, 116
- gloria*, 42, 44
 gratitude, 41, 48, 50, 53, 78, 133, 150
 guilds, *see collegia*
- Hadrian, emperor, 105, 114, 125
 heirship, 28, 39, 54, 63, 83, 150
 Hercules, 147–148
 Hermeros, guest of Trimalchio, 85, 107, 136
 home-born slaves, *see vernae*
 honor, 4, 11, 33, 35–36, 38, 42, 44, 52, 55–57,
 59–60, 68, 70, 92, 111, 120, 123–124, 126,
 129–131, 158–159, 161, 169–170, 172
 civic, 70, 126, 159, 169–170
 economy of, 59, 70, 170
 Horace, 33, 40, 74, 81, 86–91, 94, 96–97, 101,
 103, 173
 freedman father, 40, 88–91, 101, 103
 humility, 33, 57, 61, 66, 69–71, 114, 167, 172
- iconography, 11, 22, 26, 28, 33, 78
 ideology, Roman, 4, 25, 38, 51, 55, 87, 118, 123,
 125, 131, 165–166
 of slave-owning, 34, 91, 94, 117, 133, 135–137,
 145, 151, 163–164, 167–168, 172
 imperial freedmen, *see familia Caesaris*
imperium, 91, 104, 117

- incerti*, 43, 45, 138
industria, 13, 32, 37, 44, 57–61, 93, 110, 114, 120, 145
 integration, social, 1, 3, 50–51, 54, 147, 173
- Joshel, S. R., 51–52, 73
 Judaism, 37, 61, 66
 Julio-Claudians, 33, 98, 91, 96, 125, 128; *see also*
names of individual emperors
 Junian Latins, 17, 51, 134, 142
- kinship, 2–3, 30, 46, 50–52, 54; *see also* freedmen,
 Roman, families
 surrogate among slaves, 124
- lapidarii*, 22, 83
 Lares, 147–148
lex Iunia, 17, 134; *see also* Junian Latins
libertas, 71, 73, 76–78, 81, 87–88, 91, 93, 96, 118,
 159–160, 172; *see also* freedom
 coinage, 77
liberti, *see* freedmen, Roman
liberti Augusti, *see familia Caesaris*
 life course, freed, 11, 25, 33, 85, 131–169
 Livy, 78, 94
- magistracies, 2, 56, 64, 157
 manumission
 sacral, 63, 65
vindicta, 63, 76, 100
 marriage, 44, 50, 132, 134, 137, 142–143, 155
de facto, *see contubernales*
 legal, 2, 136, 142–143
 Martial, 106, 119, 154
 master–slave relationship, 75, 77, 125, 133, 136,
 156, 167, 171
 Memmius Clarus, A., 139–140
mensores, at Ostia, 12–13
 Mercury, 14–15, 147
 metaphors
 Christian, *see* Christianity, metaphors of slavery
 political, 75–81
 slavery and freedom, *see* freedom, metaphors
 of slavery and; *libertas*
 moderation, 32, 40, 57, 61, 103
modestia, 37, 45, 57, 59
 monarchy, 4, 33, 36, 55, 59, 74–76, 79–80, 87–88,
 102–103, 105–106, 112, 114–121,
 123, 126, 129–131, 158, 170, 174; *see also*
 autocracy; emperors
- monuments
 burial *see* tombs
 civic, 31, 121, 123
 commemorative, 19, 56, 106, 133, 135
 costs, 17
 literary, 31, 57, 59, 71, 104
- Mouritsen, H., 38
 Murdia, eulogy, 45
- Narcissus, imperial freedman, 107, 120
 Nero, emperor, 25, 28, 60, 78, 82, 108, 112, 116
 Nietzsche, Friedrich, 61
nomina, 3, 24, 135, 142; *see also* *cognomina*;
praenomina; *tria nomina*
 imperial, 121–123, 129
- obedience, 11, 35–39, 57–61, 66–71, 88, 104–105,
 120, 130, 164, 171; *see also obsequium*
obsequium, 13, 32, 37–38, 45, 53, 57–61, 76,
 79–80, 88, 135
 occupational skill, 32, 35, 37, 42–43, 46,
 48–50, 52, 71
 occupational titles, commemoration, 3–4, 13, 22,
 42, 51–52, 124, 144
 Old Testament, 63, 69
operae, 37, 135
ordo libertinus, 17, 89, 94, 103
 Ostia, 12–13, 30, 49, 140
- Pallas, imperial freedman, 28, 31–33, 39, 107–111,
 120–121, 123, 128–129, 174
 Parentalia, 28–29
paterfamilias, 55, 101, 124
 patience, 61, 66
 patronage, 3, 17, 25, 33, 38–39, 46, 50, 52, 77,
 110, 168
 imperial, 32, 79–80, 125–126, 170
 patron–freedman relationship, 16, 33, 47, 53–54,
 66, 124, 129, 133, 136, 156, 171
 Patterson, O., 34, 62, 167, 173
 Paul, Apostle, 37, 62–72, 157, 159, 161, 163–164,
 167–168, 172
 Pedanius Secundus, 1
 Petersen, L. Hackworth, 83
 Petronius, 4, 14–15, 25, 33, 74, 81–86, 122, 133,
 136–137, 144, 154, 168, 173
 Phaedrus, 33, 74, 81, 95–103
 Philo, 112, 119
pietas, 32, 37, 45–46, 86, 109–110
plebs, Roman, 2, 18, 78, 116, 173
 Pliny, the elder, 39, 123
 Pliny, the younger, 4, 27–28, 31–33, 39, 58,
 75–76, 79–80, 106–111, 116
 Plutarch, 116–117
 Pompeius, Sextus, 123
 Pompeius Demetrius, Cn., 95, 117
 Pomponius Atticus, T., 158
 popular culture, 74, 96, 98
 poverty, 52–53, 86
praenomina, 3, 121–122, 134
 priesthods, 43–44, 149

- probitas*, 45, 116
 Prusias II of Bithynia, 78
 Puteoli, 147
- rebirth, manumission conceived as, 94, 133, 155,
 167–168; *see also* social death
 religious cult, *see* cult
- Scipios, tomb, 28, 43–44, 157
 Scott, J. C., 19–20, 98
 self-representation, 56, 158
 Senate, Roman, 31–32, 58, 75, 81, 107–111, 115,
 120, 123, 129, 162
 honors granted to Pallas by, 31–32, 107–111,
 120, 123, 129
simplicitas, 43, 48–49
 sin, Christian, 37, 66–67, 71, 163–164, 167
 slavery, Roman
 in freedmen's life course, 11, 15, 19, 25, 35, 38,
 81, 86, 133–136, 168
 metaphorical, *see* freedom, metaphor of
 slavery and
 slaves
 ethnicity, 18, 153
 fellow, *see conservi*
 of God, 61–71, 115, 163
 as imaginative alibis, 86, 95–96
 imperial, *see familia Caesaris*
 social death, 133–134, 167, 168
 soldiers, 28, 38, 58–59, 91, 120, 173
 Statius, 4, 29, 31–33, 40, 104–106, 112–114, 117–119
 statues, honorific, 20–21, 27, 56, 108, 110–111
 status dissonance, 31, 173
 Stoicism, 34, 62, 91–95, 120, 133, 157, 159–169,
 171–172
 subjectivity, 61, 171
 Suetonius, 28, 94, 115–116, 118, 120
 suicide, 39, 60–61, 71, 101, 170
- Tiberius, emperor, 115–116, 118
tituli, 30–31, 44, 49, 51, 139, 160–161, 165
togati, 5, 10, 12–13
 tombs, 16–17, 20, 27–31, 35–36, 41–54, 71,
 82–84, 109–110, 171, 174
 Eurysaces, *see* Eurysaces, tomb
 familial, 30, 44, 51–53
 traders, 35, 48, 52, 173
 Trajan, emperor, 56, 59, 75, 79, 81, 106–107, 116
 Treggiari, S., 138
tria nomina, 11, 22, 122, 125–126, 134, 148
 Trimalchio, 14–15, 25, 54, 74, 122, 136, 144, 154,
 168, 173; *see also* Petronius
 epigraphic habit, 81–86
 triumphs, 56–57, 78
 Triumvirate, Second, 45, 87
 Tullius Cicero, Q., 117–118
- Valeria Messalina, 108
 Valerius Maximus, 39, 78
 values, 34, 61, 101, 107, 164, 167, 172–173
 Varro, 27, 158
 Venusia, 89, 142
vernae, 124–125, 127
 Vespasian, emperor, 77, 105, 119
 Veyne, P., 55, 82
vindicta, 63 *see* manumission, *vindicta*
 virtues
 normative, 32, 35, 46, 52, 60
 servile, 14, 36, 48, 67, 69, 85
 see also names of individual virtues
virtus, 35, 42, 44, 71, 90, 106, 170
 votive dedications, 31, 147–151, 167
 vows, fulfillment, 147–151
- wealth of freedmen, 1, 11, 15, 17, 25, 32, 39–40,
 51–53, 71, 74, 81–83, 85–86, 94–95, 129, 134,
 144–145, 170–171, 174
 Weaver, P. R. C., 126
 work, *see* occupational skill; occupational titles,
 commemoration